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# THE GREAT POETS AS RELIGIOUS TEACHERS



BY  
JOHN H. MORISON



NEW YORK  
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS  
1886



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## INTRODUCTION.

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**P**HYSICAL science must always hold an important place in the work of mental discipline and culture. It may do what no other pursuit can in forming habits of exact observation, comparison, classification, and analysis. Apart, therefore, from its practical uses, it is an essential branch of education. But, standing by itself, it is only a branch, and that not the highest. Wonderful as its methods and discoveries are, it does not undertake to comprehend or appreciate the highest laws of the universe, or to call into exercise man's highest qualities. The sense of right and wrong is as necessary in the investigation of morals as sight and touch are in our physical researches, and requires as keen an exercise

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of the intellect in arranging and applying the facts which are thus discovered. Here we are introduced into the great field of human conduct. Beyond the sense of right and wrong is the faculty by which we rise to a conception of the vital or efficient forces on which the outward universe, in its multitudinous operations, depends. And through this higher faculty we recognize still another order of facts. A new sun shines around us, and creates for us a new heaven and a new earth, exalting science into a divine teacher, bringing new sanctities into our homes and extending them through our wider relations with one another. It is only as these three great departments of knowledge are brought together that each finds in the others its true counterpart, and so is enabled to fill out its legitimate place as a means of education.

They who, by the common consent of mankind, have been looked up to with the greatest reverence as imperial rulers in the world of creative thought, rising highest

and penetrating farthest into the secrets of the universe, have been the seers or poets. By their revelations, and in accordance with the wants and laws of our nature, the unseen world of spiritual thought and life has been laid open to us, and thrown its hal-lowing influences around us ; making itself felt as a familiar presence from childhood to age with the individual, and from the infancy of the race onward with increasing sanctity and power in every new development.

Owing to instincts which are often safer guides than our most elaborate theories, the favorite stories and songs of children, and the folk-lore which has found its way everywhere into human hearts and homes, are made up from traditions which appeal most vividly to the imagination, and people the world with ideal conceptions. Such are the books like Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," of which thousands upon thousands of copies are demanded by each successive generation. In accordance with

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these same instincts, and for reasons which have commended themselves to wise and thoughtful men for many generations, the great poets have been recognized as august and effective teachers, and, at the head of those who have given the most perfect examples of literature, have had a leading place in the higher systems of education. It has been supposed that by studying them in their native tongues the young would become most thoroughly imbued with their mind and temper. Their sympathies would thus be refined and enlarged. Their higher faculties would be called into exercise. Drawn into closer companionship with those great souls and sharing their highest thoughts, they would naturally rise with them into a higher sphere of life, and unconsciously become endowed with an intellectual, æsthetic, and moral dignity, refinement, and simplicity which would hardly be reached so effectually in any other way.

But now the vast accumulations of wealth,

with the multiplication of material comforts and luxuries, are turning us away from these things. And the tendency of the age is still further increased by the marvellous inventions and discoveries of science, opening as they do fields of investigation in any one of which a lifetime may be spent without looking beyond its walls. Things visible and tangible assume to be the only realities, and demand for themselves the foremost place in every wise system of education. Science, which should include every department of knowledge, is narrowed down to the world of matter, which is supposed to furnish the only substantial basis of truth. The popular literature of the age is marked by the same characteristics. Even the ablest writers of fiction, for example George Eliot, fail to rise into the empyrean where the pure imagination should find itself most at home, amid the ideal conceptions best fitted to meet its infinite longings. If this tendency to materialism is allowed to go

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on without recognizing the light which comes to our higher faculties from the higher facts of the universe, it can end only in atheism and spiritual death. If our most advanced schools of learning should give in to this tendency ; if, instead of seeking to call out all our faculties, and most of all the highest, so as to make men of the loftiest and broadest type, they should lower and narrow their standard, thinking it of more importance to make specialists than men, the change is one which may awaken very serious apprehensions with those who look to the best interests of humanity.

From the beginning, and more and more as they advance in their education, at home and at school, in the books they study and the literature they read, our children should be imbued with the fact that there are laws higher than those of matter, and objects of more transcendent interest than any that can be dealt with from a purely materialistic point of view.

Without a recognition of these higher laws and agencies, the material comforts which science and the mechanical arts are providing in such boundless profusion become instruments of moral and intellectual deterioration. The loftier ideals of life, and with them its nobler aspirations and ambitions, are lost. And when they are gone, wealth, all the more because of its abundance, enters as a corrupting influence everywhere, and taints the atmosphere in which it moves.

A liberal education is not confined to institutions of learning. Sometimes it is gained by private investigations and studies in moments snatched from a busy life; and sometimes, almost without books, it is gained, amid pressing circumstances, from the complications of business, from incidental intercourse with accomplished men and women, aided by habits of solitary meditation. But wherever and however it is sought, its office, and indeed the great purpose of life in training and educating

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men and women, is to call out what is noblest and best in them; to inspire them with high aims; to enlarge and purify their minds by familiarity with the grandest thoughts and lives; and especially to exercise their highest faculties by the truest and largest conceptions of nature, man, and God. The great poets, seers, prophets, who have been the vanguard in the progress of the race, and who, by lifting men up to a higher consciousness of what they ought to be, have kept them moving forward towards a higher ideal, must always hold the highest place in every well-organized and healthful condition of society.

Other branches of knowledge must not be undervalued. They belong to our daily life, and no man can do without them. But the higher and broader culture which deals with matters of a more transcendent quality, and which lifts science and life itself into a purer and larger companionship, should enter into the training of every

child, and go with him from the nursery to the kingdom of heaven. The infant mind is open to the holiest impressions, and the more advanced the stage of intellectual progress he has reached, the more quickening and uplifting are the conceptions which he may find opening before him as he follows the guidance of the great poets of humanity.

It is the purpose of these essays to indicate, by a few illustrious examples, some of the lessons and some of the methods by which this higher training may be carried on, and our higher consciousness be at once purified and enlarged.





## I.

### *The Imagination in Religion.*



“Where there is no vision the people perish.”

PROVERBS XXIX. 18.





## THE IMAGINATION IN RELIGION.

---

**B**Y the imagination I understand the faculty of looking through outward, material forms into the unseen principles or laws by which they are governed. What we see is but an intimation or token of what is. All art, all language, the world around us, the outward experiences of life, are but symbols, more or less imperfect, of something greater behind, which we can neither hear nor see, but which we recognize by this higher faculty. We may call it vision, faith, pure reason, imagination, or what we will. It is the faculty which makes things unseen real to us, and enables us to go beyond the reach of the senses, and take in the higher facts in man and in nature.

By means of this faculty we go instinc-

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tively from the visible fact to the unseen law by which it is governed. That which is seen becomes a token or representative of what is not seen. The mathematician recognizes in the smallest segment of a curve the properties which enable him to construct the whole. The naturalist sees in the fragment of a bone the properties which enable him to construct the entire animal. In the falling apple Newton recognized a law by which the whole material universe is governed.

Because there are laws everywhere, subjecting the visible universe to their influence, and enforcing order through every department of nature, science becomes something more than an accumulation of incoherent materials. External, visible facts are arranged, harmonized, bound together, by invisible relations and affinities. It is the office of this higher faculty to discover and apply these invisible affinities or laws, and carry them out to their natural results.

What we see is the symbol of something unseen, which the imagination or divining faculty recognizes. When we look upon a face certain hues and outlines are all that the eye can see. But behind that we, through the imagination, form a conception of an intellectual, emotional, and spiritual being, whom we learn to love and honor as our friend. He, the man, is never seen by us, and makes himself known to us through sensible form and sounds only because of this higher faculty by which we go in from the seen to the unseen. That which is dearest to us is not what we see, but what we divine, — using what we see as symbols or suggestions of what lies beyond the reach of our senses. In looking at Raphael's Transfiguration or his Sistine Madonna, we see only a plane surface marked by different shades and colors. But while we look we are, through this higher faculty, brought into communication with the mind of the artist, and moved by his grand conceptions of spiritual power

and beauty. In like manner, amid the fairest scenes of nature we see only outward forms and colors, but by the imagination we are taken into a conception or apprehension of the unseen laws and presence and workings of the Infinite Mind.

From the nature of things, science, with its material instruments, can never enable us to see Him who is a spirit. But it may bring us to the borders of that unknown realm where the healthful imagination demands his infinite presence as the necessary complement of what we see and are. In "the starry heavens above" and "the moral nature within" we find laws which demand a supreme, overruling, and creative Mind to fill out these otherwise fragmentary parts, and mould them into one harmonious and consistent whole. It is the office of the imagination to fill out the divine idea which lies hidden within visible facts, waiting for some intelligent soul to follow their intimations onward to their perfect expression. In science the imagi-

nation points to the deeper meaning which lies in facts already discovered, and which demands a step onward towards a broader generalization. In art, in poetry, the imagination, feeling the limitations which our mortal condition imposes upon us, fills out, in its ideal creations, the thought of a diviner beauty, a more exalted virtue, a truer joy, as the natural fulfilment of our present being. And everywhere this divining faculty looks up into the realm of religion as the necessary complement to satisfy the demands of our highest powers. The great poets and prophets of humanity, in all the ages, have been largely endowed with this gift. But rising upward through the seen to the unseen, in what is most sacred and divine, Jesus stands immeasurably above all others. Partial disclosures of divine truth, laws imperfectly unfolded to the human consciousness through the greatest seers who had come before him, are separated from extraneous and temporary accompaniments, and filled out by his more

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penetrating and comprehensive vision. And so broad, so deep, and so high is the world of truth and life into which he would lead us that common words and images, as symbols of his far-reaching thought, like the handwriting of God on the outward universe, often fail to impart to us their divinest meaning. Instead, therefore, of seeking to measure him by our inadequate standard, it becomes us to look up reverently to him, and strive more fully to understand him. It is the office of the imagination from age to age to enter anew into his mind, and interpret his thought and life in the light of the highest moral and spiritual progress, and the most advanced ideas and intelligence.

Where the imagination exists as a great natural endowment, and is educated with our other faculties in accordance with the laws of the intellect, it sees, as no other faculty does, the grander possibilities which are involved in the little facts around us, and which grow up through them into

higher realities as their natural product. It divines the future in the present. It sees the plant in the seed. It recognizes in each specific act what is involved in it as its legitimate moral results. In the self-sacrificing precept, "He that loseth his life shall find it," it sees not only the present struggle and loss, or apparent defeat, but also, as already present and bound up in the same act, the future consequences growing out of it,—the soul endowed with a richer life, and rising triumphant in death.

From what is visible and present, as shown in the imperfect specimens around us, the imagination divines the law which governs them, and follows it out to what these imperfectly developed parts must be when they have attained to their completeness. A single example taken from Goethe's *Autobiography* will, perhaps, illustrate what I mean. While residing at Strasburg, he says, "I happened to be in a pretty large party at a country house,

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from which there was a magnificent view of the front of the Minster and the tower that rises above it. ‘It is a pity,’ says some one, ‘that the whole is not finished, and that we have only one tower.’ I replied, ‘To me it seems quite as great a pity that this one tower is not completed; for the four volutes end much too abruptly. Four light spires should be added to them, as well as a higher one in the middle where the clumsy cross now stands.’

“As I made this declaration with my accustomed earnestness, a lively little man addressed me, and said, ‘Who told you that?’ ‘The tower itself,’ I answered. ‘I have observed it so carefully, and have manifested so much attachment to it, that at last it determined to confess to me this open mystery.’ ‘It has not informed you untruly,’ he responded. ‘I have the best means of knowing, for I am the superintendent of the public edifices. In our archives we still have the original design, which says precisely the same, and which I can show you.’”

After he had carefully studied the building, the imagination of the poet, like a finer sense, recognizing in its principal parts the law which should regulate the entire construction, and following that law out through the primary lines into their proper development, arrived at conclusions coinciding precisely with those adopted by the genius which had planned the entire structure.

In the highest art, as in nature, there is nothing arbitrary. Everything must be in accordance with a divine idea or law. The great cathedral must fulfil the conditions of that idea, and grow out of it as naturally as the oak grows out of the acorn. And it is the office of the imagination to divine the law, and in accordance with it to construct the whole from any one of its parts.

Thus we see that the imagination is no fitful or capricious agent, and that it is governed as much as the eye or the reason by laws, and that the conclusions to which it leads us in its healthy action are as much

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to be relied upon as those which we reach through the senses or the reason. Indeed, it is one of the most efficient agents which the reason can use in opening the way into new fields of knowledge. Especially is it the surest pioneer in the whole realm of moral and religious inquiry, where from the finite, the visible, and the temporal are to be evolved our highest conceptions of the infinite, the unseen, and the eternal.

We need this divining faculty of the imagination in order that we may see, in their fulness, the truths of our religion, which are dimly suggested in the world around us, and which, even in the New Testament, are often revealed in imperfect and fragmentary forms of expression. The *fulness* of divine truth and life, that is, all the fulness of the divinity, as St. Paul terms it, has dwelt in but one man. Human language, from its very nature, could only partially set it forth. Even the Apostle could not take in, still less embody in words, all that is involved in it. "We know," he

says, "only in part." As the Christian mind and consciousness, in the grander development of our moral and spiritual faculties, have been enlarged, the divine fulness which was in the mind and life of Jesus, speaking through him in words and acts, has been revealing itself more and more to the foremost spirits of the world from generation to generation. Men whose imaginations have been consecrated and strengthened by holy living and thinking and a profound study of what he taught and was have been able to penetrate more deeply into the thought of Jesus, to lay hold on his instructions with a firmer grasp, and to set them forth more effectively to the reason and the heart.

This deeper, broader insight into the mind of Jesus, this grander apprehension of what he said and was, are not to be attained by the logical understanding alone. That has its important and indispensable sphere and use. But it is circumscribed and hesitating in its approach towards new

truths or new developments of truth in the highest realms of thought. No syllogisms of logic can reason out the existence of God, or set before us his boundless attributes. After our keenest powers of analysis have taken us inward as far as they can towards the primary elements of matter, the imagination comes in to fill out what is wanting, and recognizes, as essential to the completeness of all that is yet known, an element finer than all material agencies,—the force by which they act, the life in which they live.

Each separate leaf demands every organ that belongs to the plant. For without the whole each separate part would be incomplete. So in the moral world, through our affections and our moral sensibilities, society is formed, friendships are cherished, laws enacted ; but the imagination, in its grander conceptions, sees how marred and incomplete all these things are as we see them here, and so follows them upward till they are filled out and find their complete

development in him who is the highest law of our being, the life of our lives, the one satisfying object of our deepest and holiest love, the one eternal author and support of the moral order and harmony of the universe.

It is only through this faculty that we can understand the majestic imagery of the Bible, or see what its authors saw in their profound and sublime conceptions of divine truth. The logical faculty, invaluable in its place, is powerless here. It may examine texts to see what they prove, and frame its systems of divinity, believing that it has thus embodied in a creed the whole of our religion. In this way it has often happened that the Scriptures have been robbed of everything in them that is most satisfying and precious to the soul. The want of a reverent religious imagination to aid the logical faculty and supplement its deficiencies has been the cause of unmeasured harm to the church.

One of the most noteworthy features in

the teachings of Jesus is the ideal or imaginative form in which even his simplest instructions are given. A winged sentence comes to us, almost as slight in its outward structure as the thistle-down which bears its seed through the air a hundred miles, and yet it brings to us the most weighty and inspiring truths. As an illustration of this remark, I open the Gospels at random, and take the second sentence that meets my eye. "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? and not one of them is forgotten before God." How natural and unlabored the expression! How easy it is to see and to remember the whole image that is brought before us! And yet as we take it home to our hearts, and seek to follow it on with the imagination towards its full significance, it bears us up into the heavens, and introduces us, as no metaphysical expressions ever could, to the all-embracing, thoughtful, tender love of God. We see here that in the mind of Jesus the life of a sparrow requires, as its

necessary complement, the being, the love, and the providential care of God. And here the whole subject *lives* before us. Reason with our short-sighted logic as we may about unchangeable law, as the *only* agency or method by which God acts in the universe, such reasoning does not satisfy us. This image of his love, this falling sparrow, watched over and cared for by him, appeals to a higher sentiment and a higher faculty both of the intellect and the soul. We choose not to enter the logical dungeon which has been hewn out for us in the rock of God's immutable nature. These words of Jesus carry us into a larger and truer sphere, and are more in accordance with the loving kindness and perfect freedom of the Eternal Mind. They tell of a grander, truer, freer life from God to man, and of man in God.

I have spoken of the imagination as the divining faculty. In the little that lies within our reach, it discovers the law by which that little is governed, and in follow-

ing which we may be carried on to grander conclusions. In the single bone it sees the whole animal and the conditions of water, land, and air essential to it. It enables us to look upon our present life, and the faculties of mind and heart which can be brought out through the experiences that are possible in this world, as but segments of a greater whole. From these incomplete portions it divines the laws of our spiritual being, and sees, as already present, the higher opportunities and developments which are needed, in order that these laws shall reach the fulfilment of all that is implied in them. Thus it sees the future life involved as a necessity in the facts of our present existence. In its highest activity, as it shows itself in the mind of Jesus, it sees in each separate fact that which is needed for its complete development. To his mind no single flower or sparrow lives alone, but its otherwise helpless, isolated being is imbedded in the divine thought, and is watched over, cared for, and tended by the all-embracing, loving providence of God.

In the mind of Jesus the sense of the divine love and presence associates itself with every object and event, and thus fills out, with the fulness of the divine thought and love, what seems to us meagre and incomplete. There was in him a perfect blending of his mind and will with the mind and will of God. Conceptions of the eternal life and of the divine love and nearness, which it is difficult for us to gain even for a little while, went, it would seem, always with him in his daily thought, and were a part of his constant experience. As the great mathematician in the small arc of a curve, always and without effort, as by his personal consciousness, sees the whole, so Jesus, in each portion of our human life, sees the whole. He sees each fragmentary act in its completeness, involving as it does, to his open and prophetic vision, the presence of God in his laws, and the righteous retributions for good or evil which those laws are working out. The unseen spiritual world and the

unseen retributions which are bound up in every act and every disposition of mind reveal themselves to him in the act which is done, or the disposition of mind which is laid open before him.

It is so everywhere in the Gospels. Seeing great principles of religious and moral truth involved in each small segment of life, Jesus follows those principles on in their workings, without regard to the limitations of time and space which hide them from *us*. Our short-sighted perceptions and logical inferences from them leave us perplexed and bewildered. He approaches us from a higher region. Material distinctions are dissolved. The lines which separate matter and spirit disappear. He takes us up into a higher realm, that in our deepest and greatest experiences we may be made partakers with him of the *æonian*, that is, the eternal or spiritual, life, in which he lived. As we thus enter into his light our darkness vanishes away. The limitations of our physical existence seem

hardly to be recognized by him. He sees in its completeness that which stands before us apparently imperfect and incomplete. We cannot so far put ourselves in his place as to comprehend his thought in all its fulness. Yet no other teachings come home to us so tenderly and closely, or so effectively adapt themselves to our highest and dearest wants.

The office of the imagination in the discovery, the interpretation, and the application of religious thought and life is a very important and very difficult subject. But in this direction mainly we must advance, if we would attain to a deeper insight and a broader comprehension of the religion of Jesus, or so live and believe in him as to enter into his life with more vital and quickening experiences than have yet been embodied in his church or taken up into the Christian consciousness of his followers.

We must not hope to see through it all. When brought face to face with the spirit-

ual and eternal we must expect something of mystery to overshadow it. We cannot see through these things or define that which is infinite. It is absurd to talk of a scientific study of religion in its grandest manifestations and influences. Its out-works, its human agencies and instruments, the history of its sacred books and forms, may be studied with scientific care and by scientific methods. But beyond all that we can comprehend, in the infinity and eternity which no human eye or thought can penetrate, are "the hidings of that power" which, awakening in us a diviner life, would lift us above this mortal sphere, and bring us into vital relations with a purer realm of being. It is because the Calvinists of a former age and the scientific unbelievers of our day have undertaken to bring everything within the grasp of their logical rules and definitions, rejecting as unreal what they could not thus verify, that they have failed to recognize the deepest wants of our nature, the high-

est thought of the Bible, and the dearest offices of Christ to the soul.

The great poets of humanity understand better the way of dealing with the grandest problems of life, and furnish better examples for us to follow in the highest of all studies than can be found with logicians and scientists, great and beneficent as they are in their own sphere. I have endeavored to give some intimation of this better method by which we may be led into a truer liberty and a more life-giving satisfaction in our interpretation of the mind and the will of God. In this way we may begin, in our Christian studies, to employ the imagination as an efficient agent in helping us upward, with increasing love and reverence, into ever higher, broader, and more inspiring fields of vision.



## II.

### *The Great Poets as Religious Teachers.*

---

“ Men endowed with highest gifts,  
The vision, and the faculty divine.”

WORDSWORTH.





## THE GREAT POETS AS RELIGIOUS TEACHERS.

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T is the office of the imagination to fill out in its completeness that which reveals itself to us in actual life only in mutilated or imperfect examples. The philosopher or anatomist takes an ideal man as the subject of his investigations, filling out what might be wanting in any specific example. The great mathematician deals entirely with ideal forms. This divining faculty, seeing what others do not see, "outrunning the deductions of logic," and recognizing in isolated facts the law by which they and all similar facts are governed, is the distinguishing quality of the great minds who from age to age have led the human race onward by new revelations of truth in science, in govern-

ment, and in those complicated but essential qualities of thought and character which enter as vital elements into our social condition and progress.

This is preëminently true of every great poet who, under fictitious forms and by ideal examples, reveals the most substantial of all realities. He deals with ideal men and women, transforming himself through the imagination into widely different types of humanity, and showing to us the wants, the faculties, and the capabilities of our nature as they are brought out under an infinite variety of circumstances. Fictitious forms stand for underlying realities. Behind the fact which the poet assumes for the time he sees the law which it represents, and, following it on through its natural and inevitable workings, he brings before us in its most affecting features the whole attendant history. The personages by whom the problem is worked out, like the unknown quantity in an algebraic formula, may be purely fictitious, but

in every great poetic creation they are governed by the laws of their being. Recognizing and obeying those laws, the poet reveals to us their workings in living examples of men and women moved by the passions, hopes, enthusiasms, beliefs, and fears which belong to such and such types of humanity under those assumed conditions. The greatest poet is he who takes the grandest characters through the most varied and trying experiences, and fills out for us, naturally and truly, what should be their secret thoughts and emotions. There is no other process by which the wants and capabilities of our nature and the great laws of life can be so vividly and effectively brought before us.

Hence it is that in all ages the imagination has suggested the most impressive and authoritative method of teaching the highest ethical and spiritual truths. Homer and Æschylus and Sophocles were the most revered teachers in Greece; and among the accomplished scholars of our day, there

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are not wanting earnest Christian believers who find in them tokens and examples of an inspiration not unlike that of the Hebrew prophets. If Plato rose above other philosophers in his influence on the highest thought of the world and in the place he has held in its reverence, it is because his imagination lifted him above his "dialectics," and caused him to present his grandest ideas under forms which belong more to the poet than to the philosopher.

It may, therefore, be well for us to see how the most momentous of all subjects, connecting us with God and the unseen laws of his kingdom, are treated by a few of the greatest poets. For this reason I have selected three who are generally regarded as holding the highest place among the poets of modern times, while they also stand entirely apart from one another in their leading characteristics as writers and as men.

### III.

#### *Dante.*



“ Ah! from what agonies of heart and brain,  
What exultations trampling on despair,  
What tenderness, what tears, what hate of wrong,  
What passionate outcry of a soul in pain,  
Uprose this poem of the earth and air,  
This mediæval miracle of song.”

“ I lift mine eyes, and all the windows blaze  
With forms of saints and holy men who died,  
Here martyred and hereafter glorified;  
And the great Rose upon its leaves displays  
Christ’s triumph, and the angelic roundelays,  
With splendor upon splendor multiplied;  
And Beatrice again at Dante’s side  
No more rebukes, but smiles her words of praise.”

LONGFELLOW.

*Readers who would study the *Divina Commedia* without a knowledge of the Italian language will find Mr. Longfellow's translation, with the accompanying notes, an indispensable guide and help. I know of no case in which so literal an interpretation conveys the author's meaning with such extraordinary felicity and skill. For this reason I have taken the liberty to use it almost entirely in my quotations. Dr. Parsons's translation, as far as it is completed, gives in its rhythmical movement a better idea of the tone and spirit of the poem than any other translation that I know of. James Russell Lowell's article on Dante is the grandest paper of the kind that I have ever read, and may be placed with Longfellow's Sonnets on the *Commedia*.*



## DANTE.

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**D**ANTE'S "Divina Commedia" is, I suppose, taking it all in all, the greatest single product of human genius. Its subject is substantially this: Man, in his first opening affections, may be impressed with love and reverence for what is divine. There comes a time, however, when, amid other and lower attractions, this first love loses its hold upon him, and he is led astray. But he is never quite satisfied. In his difficulties and aberrations, the thought of what he has lost comes over him with a sense of awe and contrition. Then the *divine Truth*, whose beauty so entranced him once, presenting itself to him with startling authority, leads him to look into his own heart and life, and into the unseen world in which his destiny

is to be fulfilled. So, step by step, through the dread of punishment, through tears of penitence, and by renewed purity of heart and life, he is prepared to see again and to embrace the Truth which he had neglected. It rebukes him at first. Gradually, as he gives himself more entirely to it, he rises upward, and, with every new advance in his mental and moral condition, he is able to look more clearly into it, and to see in it a new attractiveness and power. Leaving other guides behind, he follows it onward and upward till it reveals itself to him in the fulness of its divine beauty and splendor.

Here, in naked prose, is the subject, if not the substance, of Dante's poem. The same thing had been preached in thousands of Christian pulpits. It had furnished the ground-work of all serious thinking and teaching from the time of the Apostles. Around it had gathered the commonplaces of religion and morals, till the life that was in it once had apparently been extin-

guished. How then could it be made the central thought of the greatest poem of all the ages?

Dante, cast out of his native city, wandering he knew not whither, without a home and with no apparent means of support, felt, with the intensity of his keenly sensitive and impassioned nature, how bitterly salt is the bread eaten by an exile at another's table, and how wearisome the stairs he had to ascend in other men's houses. Yet in all his homesickness and desolation his great mind lived in an ideal world. He saw what was in man. Under outward circumstances of prosperity and adversity alike he recognizes the presence of a free and responsible being. In every act, whether for good or evil, he sees the workings of a divine law, and in the workings of that law he finds the conditions which are required by his fine instinct of justice and mercy as the necessary complement to these visible lives, and without which everything here would exist only in

a state of suspended or mutilated development. Through these ideal realms in which the laws of our moral being are working out their natural and necessary results, his mind ranges as amid the only essential realities. When a great crime is committed, he sees at once the consequences that must follow, and in his secret thought assigns to the man who commits it his fitting place in hell,— the hell in which the soul imprisons itself by the commission of such a crime. So, to his mind, every sigh of penitence, every virtuous act, every advance of the soul upward through higher thoughts and nobler deeds, reveals to his prophetic imagination a sphere of life in which alone men and women really live. Beyond what meets the eye, therefore, he finds, actually present to his thought, ideal, but none the less real, realms of pain and contrition, in which the perpetrators of wrong may have their fitting punishment, or in which those whose sins had left them capable of penitence and purification may,

through years or ages of appropriate chastisement and grief, rise above their sins, and finally have every stain of guilt effaced. But most of all did he rejoice to follow men in their ascent upward to the world where he should find again the vanished dream of an ideal truth and beauty, and see, in a more transcendent form, what had dawned upon him in his childhood as an object of unspeakable love and reverence. In all his wanderings, intensified by his sufferings, these unseen worlds and agents were present with him, feeding his hungry heart with meat which others knew not of, and so sweetening the bitterness of his exile, and giving him some foretaste of "the peace" he craved.

Dante is himself so identified with his poetry that we can hardly understand it without knowing something of his personal history. When but a child he met a maiden, younger than himself, who made such an impression upon him that from that hour she was to him the impersona-

tion of all that is most beautiful and attractive. "When she was near any one," Dante says in his "Vita Nuova," "such modesty took possession of his heart that he did not dare to raise his eyes or to return her salutation. She, crowned and clothed with humility, took her way, displaying no pride in that which she saw and heard. Many, when she had passed, said, 'This is not a woman; rather is she one of the most beautiful angels of heaven.'" "When at length," as he says, "the Lord God of justice called away my most gracious lady unto himself," under the pressure of grief which followed, he wrote a few small poems concerning her. After this, he writes, "It was given unto me to behold a very wonderful vision, wherein I saw things which determined me that I would say nothing further of this most blessed one, until such time as I could discourse more worthily concerning her. And to this end I labor all I can, as she well knoweth. Wherefore, if it be his pleasure,

through whom is the life of all things, that my life continue with me a few years, it is my hope that I shall yet write concerning her what hath not before been written of any woman."

Gradually, as his great work opens to him its wonderful revelations, she becomes transfigured before him, till "this mortal has put on immortality," and she is no longer an earthly but a heavenly being, the impersonation of divine truth and beauty, animated and inspired by divine love. While he thus thinks of her as having her seat in the highest heavens, her present glory is thrown back on her early years, and the young maiden as well as the maturer woman, whom he once knew as the object of his purest love and reverence, is, by the transforming power of his imagination, lifted up into the same exalted sphere. The thought of her still awakens in him throbs of tender emotion, when he calls to mind their early love for one another, and the influence for good

which she then exercised over him. She is no passionless abstraction standing aloft in the cold empyrean heights, far above all human sympathies. Her features of unspotted truthfulness and beauty are suffused with the roseate coloring of womanly love and tenderness. Though divine she is also human. When first she appears in the poem, "her eyes were brighter than the star," and she began to speak "gentle and low with voice angelical." But after she had expressed her deep anxiety for Dante, "a friend of mine," she said, "and not a friend of fortune," her shining eyes now filled with tears, "weeping she turned away." And when in the highest heavens it was given him to see her for the last time in his poetic vision,

" She, so far away,  
Smiled, as it seemed, and looked once more at me,  
Then unto the eternal fountain turned."

Thus it is with her. If she is the impersonation of divine truth, she also sheds tears of human compassion. She has for

Dante not merely the stern qualities of a heavenly monitor and guide, but also the tenderness and partiality which had grown out of their personal relations and their personal interest in one another.

Here is Dante's Beatrice, the loftiest, the purest, the most beautiful and inspiring conception of woman in the literature of the world. And she is the presiding genius of the "Divina Commedia."

The poet represents himself as having fallen away from his sublime devotion to her after her death, and as being infatuated and misled by other passions and in immediate danger of more fatal results, wandering hopelessly from the true path, when Beatrice, from her heavenly exaltation, seeing that nothing else can save him, devises a way by which he may yet be rescued from destruction. He is to be taken through the abodes of departed souls. In those heretofore unseen realms, he sees in its more extended development what is in man, — what infinite capabilities

for good or evil, for weal or woe, as revealed to him in the loss and torments which each separate type of sin brings with it or drags after it as its natural consequences ; in the slow workings and fearful pangs of remorse by which the soul painfully makes its way upward through penitential inflictions and sorrows till the stains of sin are all effaced ; and in the different degrees and kinds of joy through which the different classes of the redeemed may rise, rank above rank, as the poet rises from world to world, till the highest souls are united as in one vast rose, on which the dews and sunlight of God's love falls, and into which his angels and archangels are perpetually coming, to breathe into the souls of the blessed new effluences of divine love and peace.

It is not possible, in any condensed statement or abbreviated sketch, to give an idea of the "Divina Commedia." In it all that is most vitally true in the thoughts, all that is most quickening in the experi-

ences, all that is most inspiring in the conceptions, aspirations, and prayers of the greatest thinkers, saints, and martyrs who had gone before him, may be found transfigured by the poet's creative or suggestive imagination. His subject, he says, is man. Wherever he takes us, we find ourselves in the midst of human sympathies and emotions. Even in the Inferno, amid appalling images of anguish, hatred, and despair, there is something to relieve the otherwise intolerable oppression of darkness and terror. The hurricane that drives poor Francesca da Rimini and the guilty partner of her love, hurling them onward, or whirling them round and round forever in its remorseless fury, suspends its motion a little while, when Dante calls to them :—

“ ‘ O ye weary souls,  
Come speak to us, if no one interdicts it.’  
As turtle-doves, called onward by desire,  
With open and steady wings to the sweet nest  
Fly through the air by their volition borne,  
So came they from the land where Dido is,  
Approaching us athwart the air malign,  
So strong was the affectionate appeal.’ ”

She tells her tale of love and grief,

“ And all the while one spirit uttered this,  
 The other one did weep so, that for pity,  
 I swooned away as if I had been dying,  
 And fell, even as a dead body falls.” <sup>1</sup>

This is but one of many examples by which some glow of human tenderness is let into those joyless regions. Farinata degli Uberti, shut up in his intensely heated coffin, tells Dante that the conduct of his sinful associates who are still on the earth —

“ Torments him more than doth his bed.”

And while he is speaking, a neighbor of his, the father of one of Dante's most intimate friends, recognizing his voice, lifts his head above the fiery sarcophagus in which he was confined and cries out, weeping : —

“ Where is my son? and why is he not with thee? ”

Then, misunderstanding Dante, and wrongly inferring from a single word that his son is dead, he exclaims : —

“ Is he not still alive?  
 Does not the sweet light strike upon his eyes? ”

<sup>1</sup> *Inferno*, x.

And without waiting to hear anything further, in sullen and speechless anguish he drops back again into his torturing bed.

Down almost in the lowest depths of hell, the Count Ugolino suspends for a few moments his work of fierce and ghastly vengeance, to tell the most heart-breaking of all pathetic tales, how by the treachery of the Archbishop Ruggieri, who is with him in this place of torment, he and his four children had been shut up and starved to death : —

“ I heard the locking up under the door  
Of the horrible tower ; whereat without a word  
I gazed into the faces of my sons.  
I wept not, I within so turned to stone ;  
They wept ; and darling little Anselm mine  
Said : ‘ Thou dost gaze so, father, what doth ail thee ? ’  
Still not a tear I shed, nor answer made  
All of that day, nor yet the night thereafter  
Until another sun rose on the world.”

“ When we had come unto the fourth day, Gaddo  
Threw himself down outstretched before my feet,  
Saying : ‘ My father, why dost thou not help me ? ’  
And there he died ; and, as thou seest me,  
I saw the three fall one by one, between  
The fifth day and the sixth.” <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Inferno*, xxxiii.

These expressions of a father's love and grief come from one who because of the enormity of his sins is placed in one of the lowest circles, and amid the fiercest torments, of hell. In this very neighborhood one of the most abandoned of sinners testifies that in relating what he saw in hell Dante does not confine himself to the retribution of a future world. The friar Alberigo says to him :—

“ Know that the soul, that moment she betrays,  
As I did, yields her body to a fiend  
Who after moves and governs it at will,  
Till all its time be sounded : headlong she  
Falls to this cistern.”

In proof of this he points to Branca d' Oria, who lies near. But Dante sharply replies :—

“ I think thou dost deceive me,  
For Branca d' Oria is not dead as yet,  
And eats, and drinks, and puts on clothes.”

But Branca d' Oria, the moment he committed the double crime of treachery and murder, had been hurried down into the lowest hell, and left a devil in his stead to

inhabit his body in Genoa. By such images would Dante indicate the terrible and immediate consequences of sin. Human affections, human passions, the tenderness of grief, the malignity of hate, go with the sinful everywhere through that dismal abode, creating the sorrows which are there endured and bewailed.

Dante's *Inferno* is no foreign structure arbitrarily erected. It rather symbolizes conditions of existence projected from the soul, and formed, like the shell around the nautilus, out of natural secretions from its own inmost life. Its retributions grow out of the moral constitution of man, and hold an indestructible place in the order of the moral universe. On the very heart of our humanity, as a warning and a safeguard to the soul, are inscribed the terrible words which Dante saw written in dingy colors over the gate of hell:—

“ Justice incited my sublime Creator:  
To rear me was the task of power divine,  
Supremest wisdom and primeval love.” <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Inferno*, iii.

This same eternal law of retribution, which allows no hope to the sinful while they continue in their sin, goes hopefully upward with the soul through the pangs of purgatory, and fulfils its commission in the region of supreme blessedness. I suppose that fifty persons read portions of the "Inferno," and get from that their idea of Dante, where there is one who follows him up the toilsome ascent of the mountain of purification, and thence upward still, till he has attained to the loftiest vision of what may be possible to man aided by all the ministries, human and divine, which God has ordained for his moral and spiritual advancement. In the Purgatorio, there are sufferings hardly less excruciating than those which the poet has left behind. But hope, which is shut out forever from the Inferno, is permitted to enter here, and to throw something of its gracious light around those who, through ages upon ages of pain and contrition, are expiating and expunging their sins.

Here as in the Inferno are human hearts. Here are greetings of friends, touches of human feeling, a tender interest in the world where they once lived, which relieve the dreary uniformity of unremitting suffering. All are anxious for the prayers of friends who are still living on the earth. The poet meets Nino, “a courteous judge” whom he once knew, and who now says, referring to his daughter, and to his wife who had married again and unhappily :—

“ Tell my Giovanna that she pray for me,  
Where answer to the innocent is made.  
I do not think her mother loves me more,  
Since she has laid aside her wimple white,  
Which she, unhappy, needs must wish again.  
Through her full easily is comprehended  
How long in woman lasts the fire of love,  
If eye or touch do not relight it often.”<sup>1</sup>

In the circle assigned to those who are expiating the sin of avarice, Dante meets Pope Adrian V., lying with his face downward under an overpowering burden, bound and imprisoned by the feet and hands, and saying, “ No more bitter pain

<sup>1</sup> *Purg.* viii. 71.

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the mountain hath." Of all the thousands who courted and flattered him while he lived in his great office, there are none now to remember him in their prayers. Only one person he recalls as truly his friend :—

"On earth I have a grandchild named Alagia,  
Good in herself, unless indeed our house  
Malevolent may make her by example,  
And she alone remains to me on earth." <sup>1</sup>

The poem is everywhere relieved by sweet touches of nature such as these, and by passages of rare beauty as well as of profound wisdom, which find their way to the heart like some subtle purifying and reviving essence. Unexpectedly on one occasion he feels a sudden trembling of the mountain, while from all around him there arises the sacred song, "Gloria in Excelsis." He is anxious to know the cause :—

"And lo! in the same manner as Luke writeth  
That Jesus appeared to two upon the way,  
From the sepulchral cave already risen,  
A shade appeared to us, and came behind us  
Down gazing on the prostrate multitude." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Purg.* xx. 142.

<sup>2</sup> *Purg.* xx. 167.

This is Statius, the poet, who tells them that he himself, who had been lying there five hundred years and more, had just now "felt a free volition for a better seat," and so was ready to leave these sufferings behind and rise into the courts above.

"Therefore thou heard'st the earthquake, and the pious  
Spirits along the mountain rendering praise  
Unto the Lord."

Here we see it is by no arbitrary external act, but through a change in the soul itself, a consciousness of purity regained, and with it "a free volition for a better seat," that it rises above these painful trials.

"It trembles here, whenever any soul  
Feels itself pure, so that it soars, or moves  
To mount aloft, and such a cry attends it."

Is it not a beautiful conception, that of the mountain trembling with joy, and the multitudes of sorrowing souls breaking forth into a song of gladness because one of their number, after ages of suffering, is now freed from the intolerable burden that still weighs them down?

It is, I think, more difficult for us to enter heartily into the poet's conceptions of Purgatory, and to feel the moral force and beauty of his teachings there, than to go with him in any other part of his great work. With the Reformation, Purgatory was abolished by the Protestant churches, and no longer came in to make a part of their Christian consciousness. Not the doctrine itself, but the monstrous abuses connected with it by a corrupt and mercenary priesthood who gloated over its pecuniary gains, led to this result. Between an eternal hell and heaven there was left no intermediate condition by which sinners might pass from one to the other. But within the last century, in the growth of the more humane sentiments of our religion and the more benignant ideas of justice suggested by them, there has been an increasing tendency towards the belief that, in the counsels of infinite power and wisdom, justice, not less than love, demands that there should be some proportion be-

tween the sin and the punishment; and that while a penalty for sin must be paid to uphold the law of righteousness, yet the great purpose of pain as connected with transgression is a remedial one, and that the effect of pain as a remedial agent must not be limited to this world. Under these influences, Christians of all denominations, who allow themselves to think and to follow freely the teachings of Jesus in their humane and beneficent bearings, have been relenting from their old severity and extending the sphere of our moral probation beyond the limits of this life. We are thus practically, though in a less definite and more purely spiritual form, restoring Dante's idea, and making his intermediate world more comprehensive, it may be, than both the others, at least in the early experiences of those who have just been passing out of this earthly life. From this point of view, a great deal may be learned by a careful study of the "Purgatorio."

Dante himself was not allowed to enter

Purgatory till every mark left on his countenance by the malignant atmosphere of Hell had been washed off, and he had girded himself with the reed of humility. After that, he was able to walk upward from circle to circle with a lighter step, only as one sin after another had been effaced from his heart. Near the summit of the mountain, he is approaching the border of the terrestrial paradise. A fierce flame is blazing before him. He shrinks from entering it, but is told that only when he has submitted to its searching fires, so that all the grosser elements of his nature are refined away, can he be permitted to see Beatrice. Thus excited and drawn onward by his intense desire to see her, he enters within the flame, and while standing in it he would gladly have leaped into molten glass to refresh himself:—

“ So without measure was the burning there.” <sup>1</sup>

After this he is allowed to enter the earthly paradise.

<sup>1</sup> *Purg.* xxvii.

The six closing cantos of the “Purgatorio,” in which Beatrice first appears personally before us, have a profound moral significance, and contain passages of surpassing moral elevation and spiritual beauty. It is only when we approach them, as Dante did, from the Inferno and the hardly less torturing experiences of Purgatory, and then in our best moments give ourselves entirely to them, that we can catch more than distant glimpses of their affecting and profound significance.

From the beginning of his painful pilgrimage, Dante has been looking forward to this meeting with intense longings. Now he is left to himself by Virgil, who can take him no farther. Forms of more than earthly sweetness and splendor greet him on every side and lead him on to new visions of divine benignity and truth. Before him he sees an hundred angels spring on a chariot divine, singing their song of welcome, and “scattering like the Spring-time roses all around.”

“Underneath a falling cloud of flowers,  
Which from those hands angelical rained  
    Into the chariot and around in showers,  
Wreathed over a white veil, with olive crown,  
    Appeared a woman in a mantle green,  
And living flame the color of her gown.

“Although the veil which from her forehead fell,  
Girt by that frondage of Minerva’s tree,  
    Suffered me not to see her features well,  
Queenly she looked, and yet upbraided me.”<sup>1</sup>

The angels interpose in his behalf, and ask, “Lady, why chide him so?” She, describing his great natural endowments, and the gifts and opportunities bestowed upon him by divine grace, adds severely, in words intended for him, but addressed to those around her:

“I with my beauty held him for a space,  
And with my young eyes kept his footsteps firm  
    Mine own to follow in the ways of grace.  
Soon as the threshold of its second term  
    My life had reached, and I my being changed,  
Earthly for heavenly — this man wholly gave  
    Himself to other loves from mine estranged.  
And when from flesh ascending through the grave  
    To spirit, my grace and goodness were increased,  
I was less dear, less lovely in his eyes.”

“Say,” she continues, turning to Dante, —

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Parsons’s Translation, xxx.

“say, say if this be true.” And when he, confused and overcome, confesses that it is so, she turns to him again and asks how he could have been so misled. He answers, weeping :—

“The things that present were  
With their false pleasure turned aside my steps,  
Soon as your countenance concealed itself.”

To this she replies :—

“That thou mayest feel a greater shame  
For thy transgression, and another time,  
Hearing the Sirens, thou mayest be more strong,  
Cast down the seed of weeping, and attend ;  
So shalt thou hear how in an opposite way  
My buried flesh should have directed thee.  
Never to thee presented art or nature  
Pleasure so great as the fair limbs wherein  
I was enclosed which scattered are in earth.  
And if the highest pleasure thus did fail thee  
By reason of my death, what mortal thing  
Should then have drawn thee unto its desire?  
Thou oughtest verily at the first shaft  
Of things fallacious to have risen up  
To follow me, who was no longer such.”

Here self-conviction stung Dante to the heart so sharply that he fell powerless to the ground. The other ladies again interposed in his behalf :—

“ ‘ Turn, Beatrice, O turn thy holy eyes,  
Such was their song, ‘ unto thy faithful one,  
Who has, to see thee, ta’en so many steps.  
In grace do us the grace that thou unveil  
Thy face to him, so that he may discern  
The second beauty which thou dost conceal.’ ”

She grants their request, and Dante, referring to what he then saw, exclaims :—

“ O splendor of the living light eternal !  
Who underneath the shadow of Parnassus  
Hath grown so pale, or drunk so at its cistern,  
He would not seem to have his mind encumbered,  
Striving to paint thee as thou didst appear,  
Where the harmonious heaven o’ershadowed thee,  
When in the open air thou didst unveil ? ”

Virgil, who represents the human understanding, can no longer guide Dante upward, and therefore Beatrice, or Divine Truth, takes him in charge, and as they rise from sphere to sphere, and he by his advanced intelligence and virtue is able to bear it, she with an infinite sweetness smiles upon him, and reveals to him more and more of her celestial beauty. At the lowest stage of heavenly joy, she turns towards him, “ blithe as beautiful,” and says :—

“ ‘ Fix gratefully thy mind  
On God, who unto the first star has brought us.’  
It seemed to me a cloud encompassed us,  
Luminous, dense, consolidate and bright  
As adamant on which the sun is striking.  
Into itself did the eternal pearl receive us.”

Here he feels the desire enkindled in him,—

“ That essence to behold, wherein is seen  
How God and our own nature were united.”

He finds here, in the lowest of the heavenly spheres, his wife’s sister, Picarda, and asks :—

“ ‘ Tell me, ye who in this place are happy,  
Are you desirous of a higher place,  
To see more or to make yourselves more friends?’  
First with those other shades she smiled a little ;  
Thereafter answered me so full of gladness,  
She seemed to burn in the first fire of love.  
‘ Brother, our will is quieted by virtue  
Of charity, that makes us wish alone  
For what we have, nor gives us thirst for more.  
Nay, ’t is essential to this blest existence  
To keep itself within the will divine,  
Whereby our very wishes are made one ;  
So that as we are station above station  
Throughout this realm, to all the realm ’t is pleasing,  
As to the King, who makes his will our will.  
And his will is our peace ; this is the sea  
To which is moving onward whatsoever  
It doth create, and all that nature makes.’ ”

“Then it was clear to me how everywhere  
In heaven is paradise, altho’ the grace  
Of good Supreme there rain not in one measure.”

From this blessed spirit Dante turns to Beatrice,—

“But she such lightnings flashed into mine eyes,  
That at the first my sight endured it not;  
And this in questioning more backward made me.”

This may serve as a sample of the poet’s method of taking us up into one after another of the heavenly spheres. There are passages all along of no great interest to us, especially where questions of physical science are discussed. But we are concerned only with the religious character of the work. And that is brought vividly before us, as we advance constantly into higher realms of thought and experience, and listen to the profound and lofty discoursing of those who had been, in their different spheres, the great examples and lights of the world. In the sun, or the fourth heaven, where dwell Thomas Aquinas, and the great theologians and fathers of the church, these words are heard:—

“ Whoso lamenteth him that here we die  
That we may live above, hath never there  
Seen the refreshment of the eternal rain.  
. . . In the lustre most divine of all  
The lesser ring, I heard a modest voice,  
Such as perhaps the angel’s was to Mary,  
Answer: ‘ As long as the festivity  
Of Paradise shall be, so long our love  
Shall radiate round about us such a vesture.  
Its brightness is proportioned to the ardor,  
The ardor to the vision; and the vision  
Equals what grace it has above its worth.’ ”

It is not always easy to understand what is said by these sublime teachers on the greatest of all themes. Theology, as represented in the person of Beatrice, and as taught in the heavens by those who had most truly comprehended and illustrated its meaning, becomes, as we ascend, less an intellectual statement, and more and more a quickening spirit, solving, as nothing else can, the great and terrible problems of life. The stern voice of the prophet is heard even in heaven denouncing, as the old Jewish prophets had done, the avarice, the profligacy, and wickedness of the world, and more especially the corruptions

which had crept into the church, even into its high places. But above all things, visions are granted of victory over sin and death.

“I saw the heaven wax more and more resplendent.”

And Beatrice exclaimed :—

“ ‘ Behold the hosts  
Of Christ’s triumphal march, and all the fruit  
Harvested by the rolling of these spheres.’  
It seemed her face were all aflame,  
And eyes she had so full of ecstasy  
That I must needs pass on without describing.”

“There,” she said, —

“There are the wisdom and the omnipotence  
That ope’d the thoroughfares ‘twixt heaven and earth,  
For which there erst had been so long a yearning.”

In a yet higher sphere, a still brighter vision is vouchsafed to him, which caused him to exclaim :—

“O splendor of God! by means of which I saw  
The lofty triumph of the realm veracious,  
Give me the power to say how it I saw!  
There is a light above, which visible  
Makes the Creator unto every creature  
Who only in beholding him has peace,  
And it expands itself in circular form  
To such extent, that its circumference  
Would be too large a girdle for the sun.  
In fashion then as of a snow-white rose

Displayed itself to me the saintly host,  
Whom Christ in his own blood had made his bride.  
But the other host, that flying sees and sings  
The glory of Him who doth enamour it,  
And the goodness that created it so noble,  
Even as a swarm of bees, that sinks in flowers  
One moment, and the next returns again  
To where its labor is to sweetness turned,  
Sank into the great flower, that is adorned  
With leaves so many, and thence reascended  
To where its love abideth evermore.  
Faces I saw of charity persuasive,  
Embellished by His light and their own smile,  
And attitudes adorned with every grace."

From this scene of wonder and delight,  
Dante turned to question Beatrice. But  
she had been called upward to take

"Far, far above, her seat  
Upon the throne her merits have assigned her."

"I lifted up mine eyes  
And saw her, as she made herself a crown  
Reflecting from herself the eternal rays.  
'O lady, thou in whom my hope is strong,  
And who for my salvation didst endure  
In hell to leave the imprint of thy feet,  
Of whatsoever things I have beheld,  
As coming from thy power and from thy goodness,  
I recognize the virtue and the grace.  
Thou from a slave hast brought me unto freedom,  
By all those ways, by all the expedients,  
Whereby thou hadst the power of doing it.  
Preserve towards me thy magnificence,

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So that this soul of mine which thou hast healed,  
Pleasing to thee be loosened from the body.'  
Thus I implored; and she, so far away,  
Smiled, as it seemed, and looked once more at me,  
Then unto the eternal fountain turned."

These are but samples from the *Paradiso* to illustrate its spirit and its character. But only as we study them, each in its fitting place, can we feel them in their beauty and their power. As in the previous books, so in this, the poet unfolds to us something of what he saw in man, filling out what he saw by forms and conditions of being needed for the full and happy development of all that is greatest and best within him. I dare not trust myself to make any further comment on this wonderful work ; but close the chapter by a long passage from Mr. Lowell's great article on Dante.

"The man behind the verse is far greater than the verse itself, and the impulse he gives to what is deepest and most sacred in us, though we cannot always explain it, is none the less real and lasting. . . . It is for his power of inspiring and sustaining,

it is because they find in him a spur to noble aims, a secure refuge in that defeat which the present always seems, that they prize Dante who know and love him best. He is not merely a great poet, but an influence, part of the soul's resources in time of trouble. . . .

“All great poets have their message to deliver us, from something higher than they. We venture on no unworthy comparison between him who reveals to us the beauty of this world's love and the grandeur of this world's passion and him who shows that love of God is the fruit whereof all other loves are but the beautiful and fleeting blossom, that the passions are yet sublimer objects of contemplation, when, subdued by the will, they become patience in suffering and perseverance in the upward path. But we cannot help thinking that if Shakspere be the most comprehensive intellect, so Dante is the highest spiritual nature, that has expressed itself in rhythmical form. Had he merely made us

feel how petty the ambitions, sorrows and vexations of earth appear when looked down on from the heights of our own character and the seclusion of our own genius, or from the region where we commune with God, he had done much. But he has done far more ; he has shown us the way by which that country far beyond the stars may be reached, may become the habitual dwelling-place and fortress of our nature, instead of being the object of its vague aspiration in moments of indolence. At the Round Table of King Arthur there was left always one seat empty for him who should accomplish the adventure of the Holy Grail. It was called the perilous seat because of the dangers that he must encounter who would win it. In the company of the epic poets there was a place left for whoever should embody the Christian idea of a triumphant life, outwardly all defeat, inwardly victorious, who should make us partakers of that cup of sorrow in which all are communicants with Christ. He who

should do this would indeed achieve the perilous seat, for he must combine poesy with doctrine in such cunning wise that the one lose not its beauty nor the other its sovereignty, and Dante has done it. As he takes possession of it, we seem to hear the cry he himself heard when Virgil rejoined the company of great singers,—

“‘All honor to the loftiest of poets.’”

6





## IV.

### *Shakspere.*



“And that each heart . . .  
Hath, from the leaves of thy unvalued book,  
Those Delphic lines with deep impression took.”

MILTON.





## SHAKSPERE.

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**A**S Shakspere is of all his guild the most universal genius, he reveals to us what is in man as no other poet or philosopher has ever done. In his works we find not particular men with their individual and accidental peculiarities as they actually show themselves in life; rather each person may be regarded as representing a peculiar type of manhood, with the qualities which belong to that type by virtue of his manhood, and which are therefore essential to his completeness. As we go through the vast range of Shakspere's characters, so different in their original endowments and with capabilities brought out under such various conditions, and yet with certain qualities belonging alike to all by virtue of their common

humanity, we see how, in obedience to the laws and necessities of our nature, he fills out what is wanting in history or biography, and what would not improbably have been wanting in the persons themselves as they actually appeared in their individual deportment. We do not find what Henry V. or Richard III. or Wolsey actually did and thought, but what the ideal type of manhood represented by that name should do or think under those circumstances so as to reveal to us more vividly and fully, and therefore more truly, than in actual life the elements which belong to our common humanity.

Man, as delineated and filled out by the most original and comprehensive imagination that has ever appeared in this world, is the subject of Shakspere's writings. As we study them and enter into their thought, we learn to feel what powers for good or evil are folded up within us, and what agencies are needed for the development and exercise of those powers. The

eye could not have been formed without the sun, to whose existence and influence every fibre in its structure bears witness. Man's social organization could never have been evolved without the companionship of men and women. So the yet higher faculties, which every great poet finds making a vital part of our mental and spiritual constitution, could never have come into being, except in an atmosphere of divine justice, love, and mercy, filled out for us by the actual existence and presence of God. This great fact is illustrated everywhere in the writings of Shakspere. With him the complete man is endowed always with the religious element. And where that is, there, as its necessary concomitant, is an atmosphere pervaded by influences in which it may live and have its being. In this respect, Shakspere has done for those who speak the English language a work second only to that which is done by the sacred writings. And his word comes to us all the more with authority, inasmuch

as he does not write professedly, or perhaps consciously, as a religious teacher.

In unfolding to us man's nature, this greatest of poets can no more separate him from religion, in his highest development and his highest moments, than he could separate him in his social affections from the human companionship which they require as essential to his happiness and well-being. To his imagination, filling out the conception of a complete humanity, the idea of worship and of God as necessarily involved in the idea of worship can in no wise be left out. The finest influences of nature, the heaviest responsibilities, the deepest and holiest affections, find their truest direction, their purest inspiration, encouragement, and support in this higher realm. And when men violate the laws of their moral and spiritual constitution, from this higher realm come admonitions and retributions to appall the evil-doer, and thus confirm the moral order of the universe.

All this we find in Shakspere hardly less than in the Gospels. I will not say, as has been said, that Shakspere is the most Christian poet that ever lived ; but I do say that often, both in spirit and in method, he, more than any other writer, reminds me of the Gospel teachings. No two things could be more unlike, in their immediate purpose or final intention, than the words of Him who came to redeem the world from sin, and the writings prepared to entertain a popular audience at a London theatre. No one probably has felt this contrast more painfully than the poet himself. Hence, the pathetic strain in which he chides "with Fortune," as he says :—

"That did not better for my life provide  
Than public means which public manners breeds.  
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand ;  
And almost thence my nature is subdued  
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand."

It is always with a profound and most touching reverence that he refers to Jesus, as in passages like these :—

“In those holy fields  
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet  
Which fourteen hundred years ago were nailed  
For our advantage on the bitter cross.”

“Alas, alas !  
Why all the souls that were were forfeit once;  
And he that might the vantage best have took  
Found out the remedy. How would you be,  
If He, which is the top of judgment, should  
But judge you as you are?”

Many things there are in his dramas which we would gladly expunge, and in which he yielded to his own rollicking disposition or to the requirements of the stage and of the times. But his gentle Christian spirit, so merciful and at the same time so true, goes with him wherever he goes. His subject is man, into whose nature he looks with a quick and profound insight and a tender sympathy with men of all sorts and conditions, recognizing in them everywhere affecting tokens of a common brotherhood. His keenness of perception does not, like the policeman’s dark lantern, rejoice only in detecting the malefactor. But with a more ardent joy

he uses it as a kindly light to discover "some soul of goodness in things evil," — and even in bad men. Thus it is that he awakens in us an interest in persons whom we might find intolerable if we should meet them in actual life. It is not what *we* might see in them, but what the great poet of humanity who is speaking to us through them sees, that so deeply interests us.

Thus it is that he reveals to us often, where we should least expect to find them, marks of consanguinity which cannot fail to touch our hearts as they did his. Even so poor a creature as Falstaff is not sent away as an utter outcast at last, but babbling "of green fields," and crying "out 'God, God, God,' three or four times," his last moments being thus embalmed by the sweet memories of his childhood, and the one word which may well place us all on the same lowly level, as common suppliants before the Infinite mercy. May not this sympathy with a very sinful man re-

mind us of One who looked with loving compassion on those whom very respectable and devout men would drive away from their presence as unworthy and unclean?

And this faculty of seeing quite through the deeds of men and showing them to us as they are, with a kindly regard to the good qualities which may be bound up with what is evil in them, is not confined to the poet's treatment of persons comparatively insignificant or worthless. With equal tenderness and justice, "speaking the truth in love," he deals with men of world-wide celebrity whose overmastering faults otherwise might hide their less conspicuous virtues. A careful examination of his writings, with this object in view, will perhaps reveal him in a new light to one whose attention has not been called to this Christ-like feature in the judgments, so true and yet so merciful, which he passes on the great men whom he calls up before his judgment seat. As one of many exam-

ples, we may take “the great child of honor, Cardinal Wolsey,” as Queen Katharine called him. What can be more tender, more touchingly beautiful, or more severely true than the way in which his name and memory are dealt with, when,

“ Full of repentance,  
Continual meditations, tears and sorrows,  
He gave his honors to the world again,  
His blessed part to heaven, and slept in peace!”

Of “too much honor,” he had been made to say before,—

“ O ’t is a burden, Cromwell, ’t is a burden  
Too heavy for a man that hopes for heaven.”

“ O Cromwell, Cromweil,  
Had I but served my God with half the zeal  
I served my king, he would not in mine age  
Have left me naked to my enemies.”

And when he died, after his faults and his sins, his unbounded ambition, his double dealing, his cruelty towards those who stood in his way, have been faithfully recounted, his grander qualities — “fashioned” as he was “to much honor from his cradle”— are lovingly brought out.

“ His overthrow heaped happiness upon him;  
For then, and not till then, he felt himself,

And found the blessedness of being little :  
And, to add greater honors to his age  
Than man could give him, he died fearing God.”

Well might the dying queen, after hearing this, say :—

“ Whom I most hated living, thou hast made me,  
With thy religious truth and modesty,  
Now in his ashes honor : peace be with him.”

But there is a broader sense in which the relationship of our greatest poet to the Gospels shows itself. There is nothing forced or conventional in the moral and religious ideas which run through his dramas. The lesson and the feelings appropriate to it flow out of the subject as naturally as perfume from the rose. Two young lovers, listening to music in the delicious moonlight of an Italian evening, prompted by the exuberance of their joy, break out into thoughts like these :—

“ Look, how the floor of heaven  
Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold :  
There’s not the smallest orb which thou behold’st  
But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still quiring to the young-ey’d cherubims,—  
Such harmony is in immortal souls ;  
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay  
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.”

Henry V., before the battle of Agincourt, with the solicitude natural to a monarch under circumstances so critical, goes through his camp in the darkness of the night before the day had begun to dawn, and thus gives utterance to the thoughts that press most heavily upon him :—

“ Not to-day, O Lord,  
O not to-day, think not upon the fault  
My father made in compassing the crown!  
I Richard’s body have interred new;  
And on it have bestowed more contrite tears  
Than from it issued forced drops of blood:  
Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,  
Who twice a-day their withered hands hold up  
Toward heaven, to pardon blood. . . .

    . . . More will I do;  
Though all that I can do is nothing worth,  
Since that my penitence comes after all,  
Imploring pardon.”

In “ Hamlet,” the guilty king, left to himself, breaks out into these words :—

“ But, O, what form of prayer  
Can serve my turn? Forgive me my foul murder?  
That cannot be; since I am still possessed  
Of those effects for which I did the murder,—  
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.  
May one be pardoned, and retain th’ offence? ”

In “ Richard III.,” before the last fatal

battle, Shakspere depicts, in visions of judgment and terror, the workings of a guilty conscience, unnerving the warrior whose resolution and courage had never failed him before in any desperate emergency.

Queen Katharine, in the near prospect of death, waking out of sleep, exclaims, —

“ Spirits of peace, where are ye? are ye all gone,  
And leave me here in wretchedness behind ye?

*Griffith.* Madam, we’re here.

*Kath.* It is not you I call for.

Saw ye none enter since I slept?

*Grif.* None, Madam.

*Kath.* No? Saw you not, even now, a blessed troop  
Invite me to a banquet; whose bright faces  
Cast thousand beams upon me like the sun?  
They promised me eternal happiness,  
And brought me garlands, Griffith, which I feel  
I am not worthy yet to wear: I shall,  
Assuredly.”

In all these cases, hardly less than in the Gospel narratives, we are compassed about by moral and religious forces, presented to us here, as there, under imaginative forms, and all, not for the sake of teaching a lesson, but as the natural and spontaneous utterances of the human soul.

I doubt whether there is a single essential doctrine or precept of the Gospels which is not directly or indirectly recognized and enforced by Shakspere. This he has done, not only in scenes like those from which we have quoted, and in the retributions which work themselves out by natural processes in his plays, but often in short single sentences, often single ejaculations, forced from men under the pressure of the moment.

“ Let us know  
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well,  
When our deep plots do fail: and that should teach us  
There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough hew them how we will.”

“ The quality of mercy is not strained,  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath: It is twice blessed,  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.”

“ Ah, what a sign it is of evil life,  
When death’s approach is seen so terrible.”

“ The immortal part needs a physician;  
Though that be sick it dies not.”

“ The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices  
Make instruments to scourge us.”

Many pages might be filled with pas-

sages of similar import, all recognizing religion as a necessity of our nature.

Shakspere's religion is preëminently a natural religion. It comes everywhere as a spontaneous utterance to meet the deeper wants of our being. He who, more than any other poet, sounded all the depths of our nature, and knew as no one else had known the secret workings of the soul, finds everywhere substantially the great truths of the Gospel naturally adapting themselves to the mind of man, and creating around him an atmosphere in which his highest faculties can live and thrive under the severest trials, and in the greatest emergencies of his earthly experience. In Shakspere's works, as in the book of nature, we meet these wonderful revelations of divine truth. They rise before us by no arbitrary processes or mechanical ingenuity. As the vibrating chandelier or the falling apple, to the penetrating imagination of Galileo or Newton, laid open what had hitherto been a hidden law of

the material universe, so the manifold operations of the human mind and heart laid open to the imagination of Shakspere the essential wants, and in them the laws, of our moral and spiritual being. And those laws, as he represents them, both in themselves and in their mode of expression, are essentially the same that we find in the Gospels.

Both bring before us by easy and natural methods what commends itself to us at once as the religion of nature. And by nature I mean the whole physical and moral universe, each section an organic part of one infinite whole. So it seemed to Shakspere, as the passages I have quoted and an intelligent reading of his works may show. The world, to his mind, was not divided into separate compartments, one portion sacred and the other profane, but every part belonged to the universal order, which is divine, and every man had in his own organization that which allied him to what is highest and

best. As the humblest plant reaching up through the darkness of the earth seeks the air and sunshine as its own inheritance, and every fibre as it is evolved tells of its relationship to them, so the human soul, reaching up through the obstructions of time and sense, by every higher thought and sentiment evolved within it, claims as its birthright the fostering help of the highest moral and spiritual laws and agencies. There are no elaborate arguments, no evidences or cunningly devised systems of morals or divinity; but wherever man is awakened by his deepest and loftiest experiences, there the fitting atmosphere is found, and the soul, like a new-born infant, breathes its native air, and finds in that purer realm its appropriate nourishment.

When a man's higher faculties are born, they find the higher realm which reveals itself to his spiritual, as the material world reveals itself to his bodily, eye. So it is in Shakspere. He looked into the soul of man, and filled out what he saw there by

the conception of a world of spiritual ideas, laws, and agencies implied by it and essential to its completeness. To him the natural and the supernatural were but harmonious parts of the same divine order. And is not this precisely what we find in the Gospels? The outward form is different, but the substantial results are the same. Men have thrown around the Gospels and substituted for them their artificially constructed theories of Christianity. But in the Gospels themselves all is clear and natural as the sunlight. If there are doctrines which are not understood, it is either because they are obscured by the glosses which human ingenuity has put upon them, or because, like operations in the material world which are not yet understood, they lie too deep, or are too far in advance of our present attainments, to be fully comprehended. Truths the most salutary and far-reaching—truths which enter vitally into the deepest workings of our nature—open before us in the Ser-

mon on the Mount as naturally and with as benignant a grace as hill and valley reveal themselves to us at the approach of the morning light. And as it has been in the past, so in all future ages, we believe, with every new accession of life from within or of light from abroad to the individual or the race, they will unfold themselves with increasing vitality and power.

Nothing can be more natural than the teachings of Jesus. His appeal is to the mind and heart of those around him. We need only to read his life and words to see that with him natural and revealed religion are one. Everywhere, in man and nature, he beholds the indwelling and perpetually creative presence of God. Heaven is his throne, the earth is his footstool. The flowers of the field, the raven and the sparrow, still more his disciples, and even the poorest outcast among men, are objects of his loving care. Religion with its beneficent laws and ministrations is everywhere recognized as a vital influence, interfusing

itself through all that is sweetest and best in nature and in man. The more profoundly we enter, with our deepest thought and experiences, into the Sermon on the Mount, the more clearly shall we see how naturally the religion of Jesus adjusts itself to the highest wants and faculties of our nature. He who saw, as no one else has ever done, the hand and the mind of God everywhere in what were to others only "the hidings of his power," had but to lift the veil which obscured the vision of those around him, and lo, everything became a token or a revelation of God's most holy laws and his beneficent dealings with his children. Jesus did not create "life and immortality." He "brought" them "to light." From the beginning to the end of the Gospels, it is the uplifting of a veil, or rather the opening of our eyes, that we may see facts which had been kept secret so long, only because they were waiting for some one able to see and to reveal them in all their gracious influences.

And in harmony with the Gospels are the lessons taught us by the greatest of all poets. In the power of filling out what is seen of man in his earthly environment by the additional conception of the laws and agencies associated with him as a living member of God's unseen kingdom, there can of course be no comparison between the two. But the poet's transcendent imagination carries him farther in this direction than any other poet has ever gone, and as far as he goes, by his own independent processes, he reaches substantially the same results, filling out what others see in human life and conduct by the unseen moral and spiritual facts involved in them. His words, like those of Jesus, are not to be taken literally, but as symbols of what no human language can express so forcibly in any other way. And in proportion as the poet rises above individual and accidental distinctions, his images, like algebraical characters, become exponents of facts which belong, not as individual char-

acteristics, to one man or another, but as qualities imbedded in our nature, and making a part of our human constitution.

Dante follows his characters on after death, and in what awaits them there fills out for us his conception of the consequences involved in the lives they lived on earth. Shakspere, on the other hand, while not unmindful of "the life to come," reveals to us the unseen influences for weal or woe which meet us here "upon this bank and shoal of time." Mightier than any earthly condition are these ministrations of divine justice or mercy.

Take Macbeth as an illustration of his method. He comes before us, a brave man, whose deeds of loyalty and courage gain for him —

"Golden opinions from all sorts of people,"

together with thanks and praise and new dignities from the king. But no sooner has an unhallowed ambition gained a foothold in his mind, than it begins to throw its baleful shadows around him.

“ Present fears  
Are less than horrible imaginings.”

As he approaches the act of treachery and murder, “ these compunctious visitings of nature ” grow more terrible. His courage fails.

“ We will proceed no further in this business.”

When stimulated and forced on by his wife so as to

“ Bend up  
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat,”

the whole atmosphere, to him, is filled with blood and terror.

“ Thou sure and firm set earth,  
Hear not my steps which way they walk, for fear  
The very stones prate of my whereabout,  
And take the present horror from the time,  
Which now suits with it.”

And when the deed is done, this awful nemesis makes itself immediately and still more fearfully felt.

“ Methought I heard a voice cry ‘ Sleep no more!  
Macbeth does murder sleep.’ . . .  
Still it cried ‘ Sleep no more! ’ to all the house:  
‘ Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor  
Shall sleep no more,— Macbeth shall sleep no more.’ ”

“ How is ’t with me, when every noise appalls me?  
What hands are here? ha! they pluck out mine eyes.  
Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand?”

And so, through the whole downward progress of his life, the fatal work of retribution is going on. Unseen terrors become overpowering realities. In the fulness of kingly grandeur, he grows to be more and more the victim of “horrible imaginings.”

“ Better be with the dead  
Whom we, to gain our place, have sent to peace,  
Than on the torture of the mind to lie  
In restless ecstacy. Duncan is in his grave;  
After life’s fitful fever he sleeps well;  
Treason has done his worst: nor steel, nor poison,  
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,  
Can touch him further.”

New crimes only lead him into new complications of wretchedness. All the joy of life is gone forever. He has “supped full with horrors.”

“ I ’m sick at heart.

• • • • •  
I ’ve lived long enough: my way of life  
Is fall’n into the sear, the yellow leaf;  
And that which should accompany old age,  
As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have.”

“Out, out, brief candle!  
Life’s but a walking shadow; a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more.”

Except in the New Testament, I know not where we can find such a lesson of retribution, working out by natural processes the terrible consequences of evil-doing in the soul, and picturing them to us by images expressing such unspeakable desolation and sorrow.

And not less does the poet unfold to us, in characters of perennial light and beauty, the sweet and blessed experiences of self-forgetting love and purity, the moral elevation and inward satisfactions which go with those who, living true and faithful lives, are yet subjected to the sharpest disappointments and sorrows. Queen Katharine has already been brought forward as an example of this kind. We have seen how, through the imagination of the poet, her last hours, otherwise so dismal, were lighted up by visions of transcendent joy and loveliness.

The inward satisfactions which entered so deeply and with so vital a power into the mind and heart of Cordelia are not easily described. Her whole history, superficially considered, is such a violation of the laws of a righteous retribution as to shock the moral sensibilities of a shallow-minded and profligate generation. For this reason, some third-rate poet in the time of Charles II., with nothing of Shakspere's profound moral and spiritual insight, gave the tragedy a prosperous conclusion, thus debasing and vulgarizing the sublime conceptions of the poet. And in this mutilated condition, it held its place on the stage a hundred and sixty years.

As she came from the creative imagination of the poet, Cordelia is the richest, deepest, most entirely unselfish, the most profoundly pious, and the most perfectly harmonized of all his characters. She lived in a heathen age and land, but in her we find fulfilled what Mr. Lowell meant when he spoke of embodying "the Chris-

tian idea of a triumphant life, outwardly all defeat, inwardly victorious." She is endowed with the finest qualities of our nature, called into exercise under the most trying conditions, and in them we see reflected the richest gifts and graces of our religion. The beatitudes dwell in her as in their own beautiful and native home. In her is an infinite wealth of love,—a life fed from the eternal fountain, and endowed with a joy and peace which the world can no more give than it can take away.

To such natures, under the fiercest trials, there is given, as by divine appointment, an exaltation of soul, which looks down on pain and grief and whatever there may be worse than these with a sublime unconsciousness of evil. So is it with Cordelia. She needs not the wealth or the happiness of this world, but rather its trials to call out within her what is sweetest and best. In her heart, which, like that of Chaucer's Custance, is "a chamber of holiness," and in such a life as hers, there

abides a jewel richer than all the world beside, which can borrow no additional worth from outward circumstances, and would only cheapen itself by seeking the costliest materials that could be used to set it off. Outwardly everything turns against her. But sorrows and sacrifices are transfigured by the soul that shines through them.

“ Patience and sorrow strove  
Who should express her goodliest.”

When she wept, —

“ She shook  
The holy water from her heavenly eyes.”

“ In brief, sorrow  
Would be a rarity most belov’d, if all  
Could so become it.”

Well might her father say of her, —

“ Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,  
The gods themselves throw incense.”

Each new aggravation of wrong only takes her up into a higher realm. When the last terrible ordeal has come, there is no sign of weakness, no cry of distress. “ We are not the first,” she calmly says, —

“ Who, with best meaning, have incurred the worst.”

In the sublime elevation where she stands, death has no power to harm or terrify, but is welcomed rather as a consecration and a sacrament. She dies, to be crowned with an eternal loveliness and beauty ; young indeed, but by no untimely end. For we know that the highest purposes of life have been fulfilled in her, and that life so lost will assuredly be found. In the creation and treatment of such a character, Shakspere shows how thoroughly he could enter into the deepest spiritual resources of our nature, and how well he could appreciate the feelings of him, who, the evening before his crucifixion, with a full knowledge of what lay before him on the morrow, and with all the powers of darkness arrayed and apparently prevailing against him, could ask no better gift for his friends than that his joy might be fulfilled in them.

The view which I have given of Cordelia may, to some persons, appear far-fetched and extravagant. But it places the closing

scenes of "King Lear" on a level with what has gone before, and makes of them a fitting conclusion to what Mr. Furness justly calls "the sublimest tragedy ever written, so awful in its grandeur that it almost passes into a realm by itself."

Very wonderful is the faculty which Shakspere has of taking us up almost without our knowing it, by means of some powerful emotion, into his own mountain-heights of vision, and drawing us into harmony with his holiest and loftiest creations, so that their lightest breath touches a chord, and brings forth kindred music in our hearts. Without saying one word concerning religion, he makes us feel its presence, as an all-pervading atmosphere, blending with our deepest emotions, and awaking in us the sentiments of reverence and prayer. In the stormiest sea of troubles its heavenly spirit comes, as the dove over the waste and troubled waters of a deluged world, with its olive branch of peace. And when we have been racked

and distressed by tempests of passion, by crime and outward horrors, this same spirit, reflected from the very blackness of the storm, shines with a diviner light into our hearts, as did the bow of promise when God first placed it in the clouds, a token of his loving presence, and a sign that he would no more destroy the earth.

It is a great thing for us who speak the English language, that our greatest poet should have been so grandly endowed with the faculty which looks through "this muddy vesture of decay" and the shadows it throws around us, into what is spiritual and divine; that he should have been able to enter so far within the veil, and bring thence from "the holy of holies" qualities of such unspeakable worth and beauty, to enlarge our conceptions of what is fairest and best, and so to exalt, enrich, and adorn for us this human life of ours, and show us how it can be made divine.

V.

*Goethe.*



“ All things transitory  
But as symbols are sent.”

FAUST.





## GOETHE.

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N these papers I am speaking of the great poets only as religious teachers. Whatever I may say of their personal characteristics or of their poetical merits in other respects is only incidental, or in its relation to my principal subject. The fact on which I would dwell is, that no really great poet who knows what is in man has been able to fill out his conception of a complete and perfected manhood without recognizing religion as its deepest and highest attribute.

As a further illustration of this I would take Goethe's "Faust," which his biographer, Herman Grimm, with perhaps pardonable extravagance, calls "this greatest work of the greatest poet of all nations

and times." I cannot but think that Goethe better understood his own position. He said: When the Schlegels "tried to raise him (Tieck) above his proper place and spoke of him as my equal, they made a mistake. I do not hesitate to speak of myself as I am: I did not make myself. But I might, with as much propriety, compare myself with Shakspere, who also is as he was made, a being of higher order than myself, to whom I must look and pay due reverence."

Five days before his death Goethe said, in a letter to his friend, William von Humboldt, "For more than sixty years have I had before me my youthful conception of Faust, — the whole series having been from the first clear to me, though not in all their details." In his Dedication to the first part of the tragedy, written more than thirty years before the second part was finished, he already speaks of those who witnessed its beginning as belonging to a past generation.

“ They hear no longer these succeeding measures,  
The souls, to whom my earliest songs I sang:  
Dispersed the friendly troop, with all its pleasures,  
And still, alas! the echoes first that rang!  
I bring the unknown multitude my treasures;  
Their very plaudits give my heart a pang,  
And those beside, whose joy my Song so flattered,  
If still they live, wide through the world are scattered.

“ And grasps me now a long-unwonted yearning  
For that serene and solemn Spirit-Land;  
My song, to faint *Æolian* murmurs turning,  
Sways like a harp-string by the breezes fanned.  
I thrill and tremble; tear on tear is burning,  
And the stern heart is tenderly unmanned.  
What I possess, I see far distant lying,  
And what I lost, grows real and undying.”

I copy from Bayard Taylor’s Translation of *Faust*, which, with its accompanying notes, furnishes most of the available help needed by the student who would understand this remarkable work.

The poem opened upon Goethe in his early youth, and, during his whole life of more than fourscore years, it held a foremost place in his thoughts, tasking his highest powers of invention to fill out in detail his conception of the capabilities and wants of our nature. As in the works

of Dante and Shakspere, so in this, his greatest work, the subject is Man. The old story of Faust's compact with the devil furnishes the groundwork of the plot.

Faust, a student, has exhausted all the sources of knowledge open to him, and finds for himself no real satisfaction or repose. It is Easter Sunday. But the songs which he hears from the streets, of Disciples and Angels, only awaken a painful sense of what he has lost in being taken away from his early faith.

“ Once Heavenly Love sent down a burning kiss  
Upon my brow, in Sabbath silence holy ;  
And, filled with mystic presage, chimed the church bell slowly,  
And prayer dissolved me in a fervent bliss.  
A sweet, uncomprehended yearning  
Drove forth my feet through woods and meadows free,  
And while a thousand tears were burning,  
I felt a world arise for me.  
• • • • • • • •  
Sound on, ye hymns of Heaven, so sweet and mild !  
My tears gush forth : the Earth takes back her child ! ”

While he is in this unsatisfied and unbelieving state, the devil, under the name of Mephistopheles, appears, and offers to serve him. This offer Faust accepts, with

the single condition, that if ever he should be entirely happy for a single moment, that day should be his last.

“ When thus I hail the Moment flying:  
‘ Ah, still delay—thou art so fair!’  
Then bind me in thy bonds undying,  
My final ruin then declare!  
Then let the death-bell chime the token,  
Then art thou from thy service free!  
The clock may stop, the hand be broken,  
Then Time be finished unto me.”

The problem, then, to be solved by the poem is, What can so far satisfy a human soul, that for a single moment it shall be entirely happy? All the resources of this world, of knowledge, wealth, and art, of society and nature, supplemented by “supernatural solicitings” and aids, are placed at the young man’s disposal. Whatever can fascinate the senses, or gratify his love of pleasure or power, whatever his ambition or his passions may desire, is freely granted to him. But with all these helps he only grows more restless and unsatisfied. He falls in love with Margaret, a young and innocent maiden, the type of earthly

beauty. But love which is not regulated and sanctioned by a diviner law brings only unhappiness and ruin. Through all his experiences in this direction there has never been a moment to which he could say:—

“Ah, still delay — thou art so fair.”

The search for selfish gratification ends in utter discomfiture and sadness to himself, and in sorrow and death to the only being that he loves. In “The Inferno” of Dante there is no pathos more touching, or more profoundly tragical, than that which associates itself with Margaret ; and no wail of grief more piercing than that which comes to us from this heart-broken, conscience-smitten, frightened child, the victim rather than the accomplice of Faust. With the loss of maidenly innocence, all her happiness is gone. Her spinning song,—

“My peace is gone,  
My heart is sore,  
I never shall find it,  
Ah, never more! ”—

is too well known to be repeated here.

So is her cry of anguish to the Virgin Mother, the Mater Dolorosa.

“ Alone, and ah ! unsleeping,  
I’m weeping, weeping, weeping,  
The heart within me breaks.

“ The pots before my window,  
Alas ! my tears did wet,  
As in the early morning  
For thee these flowers I set.

“ Within my lonely chamber  
The morning sun shone red :  
I sat, in utter sorrow,  
Already on my bed.

“ Help ! rescue me from death and stain !  
O Maiden !  
Thou sorrow-laden,  
Incline thy countenance upon my pain ! ”

In the great cathedral, while they are singing the Judgment Hymn, the air becomes too close for her.

“ I feel as if the organ here  
My breath takes from me.”

“ I cannot breathe !  
The massy pillars  
Imprison me !  
The vaulted arches  
Crush me ! — Air ! ”

She is driven from one to another extreme of wretchedness. She is tried for child-murder, and convicted. She lies in prison, helpless and hopeless, condemned to death, and awaiting the hour when the executioner shall come for her. Faust, in the darkness of night, finds his way to her, and hopes to rescue her. The poor frightened child mistakes him for the headsman, and cries out in terror :—

“ Art thou a man, then pity my distress ! ”  
“ Thou’rt come for me at midnight-hour;  
Have mercy on me, let me live !  
Is’t not soon enough when morning chime has rung ?  
And I am yet so young, so young !  
And now Death comes, and ruin !  
I, too, was fair, and that was my undoing.  
My love was near, but now he’s far ;  
Torn lies the wreath, scattered the blossoms are  
Seize me not thus so violently !  
Spare me ! What have I done to thee ? ”  
“ O let us kneel, and call the Saints to hide us ! ”  
“ Judgment of God ! myself to thee I give. ”  
“ Thine am I, Father ! rescue me !  
Ye angels, holy cohorts, guard me,  
Camp around, and from evil ward me ! ”

In confusion, anguish, and supplication, Margaret disappears. Mephistopheles,

with an air of triumph, eagerly exclaims, "She is judged." And from afar, as from another world, a voice is heard, saying: "She is saved." Faust, hearing his name spoken by Margaret, vanishes in darkness and misery. And no moment has ever yet come to which he could say, —

"Ah, still delay — thou art so fair!"

Here endeth the first lesson.

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Fifty years have passed by, and Faust, in the Second Part of the tragedy, is again placed before us. He is now eighty years old. He has left the young man's life behind, with its impulses and passions. The little world of ambitions and indulgences centring in himself has long since been given up. He now belongs to the larger world of human interests, and is to take part in the great onward movements of humanity.

He first appears amid beautiful objects of nature. Aerial spirits are circling round him in the balmy airs of spring, to refresh

him in body and mind. And in order to separate him entirely from the tumultuous experiences which lie now so far behind, they sing to him :—

“ Now the Hours are cancelled for thee,  
Pain and bliss have fled away :  
Thou art whole : let faith restore thee !  
Trust the new, the rising Day ! ”

He feels the inspiration, and says :—

“ Life’s pulses now with fresher force awaken  
To greet the mild ethereal twilight o’er me ;  
This night, thou, Earth ! hast also stood unshaken,  
And now thou breathest new-refreshed before me,  
And now beginnest, all thy gladness granting,  
A vigorous resolution to restore me,  
To seek that highest life for which I’m panting.”

“ That highest life ” he is now to seek. The disappointments and sufferings which he went through long years ago have helped to give clearness and steadiness to his mind, and to free the atmosphere from the false coloring by which he had once been deceived and misled. With mature ideas and purposes, guided by the intellect more than by personal feeling, he engages in interests and pursuits closely connected with the well-being of man and his higher

development, and thus enters on his new and more comprehensive career.

“Faust,” says Bayard Taylor, “in the First Part, is an individual, in narrow association with other individuals ; here he is thrown into the movement of the world, the phenomena of human development, and becomes, to a certain extent, typical of man.”

By the aid of Mephistopheles, who is becoming more his servant, and less and less a ruling or guiding spirit, all the resources of this world, physical, intellectual, and moral, as they present themselves to the imagination of the poet in his ever enlarging attainments and experiences, are placed at his disposal.

He attaches himself to the Emperor, but amid the trickeries, formalities, and corruptions of government he finds no way by which he can render any really important service. Mephistopheles willingly enough helps him to relieve his sovereign from his financial embarrassments by the

indefinite issue of paper money ; for that is one of the Devil's tricks. He also very willingly helps the Emperor to win battles ; for in the cruelties and wrongs perpetrated by war he finds himself entirely at home. But when he is required to restore to life Helena of Greece, that the people may be refined and purified by her, that is, by a higher type of beauty and consequently a higher æsthetic culture, Mephistopheles, seeing in this an influence unfavorable to his ascendancy, very unwillingly lends his aid. But Faust, who has turned wearily from one after another of the prizes which men covet most, gladly seeks for what is highest in classic art (personified under the name of Helena) as an efficient factor in the advancement of society.

“The sense of the Beautiful in the human mind,” says Bayard Taylor, “is introduced as a most important agent in human culture, gradually refining and purifying Faust’s nature, and lifting it forever above all the meanness and littleness of the

world." Beauty is not employed here, as in the First Part, to allure the senses and excite the passions, but in the higher form suggested by Goethe when he says: "The Beautiful is a primeval phenomenon, which indeed never becomes *visible itself*, but the reflection of which is seen in a thousand various expressions of the creative mind, as various and as manifold as the phenomena of Nature." Faust's consecration and devotion to this primeval beauty is symbolized by his love for Helena and his union with her. But the union of a mortal man with a perfect ideal beauty cannot be a permanent relation. The child which is born to them, and which represents poetry, produced by a union of the Classic with the Romantic, breaks loose from their control, and soon dies, leaving only his "garment, mantle, and lyre" upon the ground. Hardly has the funeral dirge for him ceased, when Helena says to Faust, —

"Also in me, alas! an old word proves its truth,  
That Bliss and Beauty ne'er enduringly unite.

Torn is the link of life, no less than that of love;  
So, both lamenting, painfully I say: Farewell!  
And cast myself again — once only — in thine arms."

Her corporeal part disappears; only her garment and veil remain with him. The Goddess herself — the divine beauty which she represents — is gone. But the garment in which she was enfolded is his.

"Hold fast what now alone remains to thee.

It is no more the Goddess thou hast lost,  
But godlike is it. For thy use employ  
The grand and priceless gift, and soar aloft!  
'T will bear thee swift from all things mean and low  
To ether high, so long thou canst endure."

"Helena's garments dissolve into clouds, surround Faust, lift him aloft in the air, and move away with him." He is thus borne upward into a higher plane, even while losing the soul and essence of her being, and clinging only to the garments which she has left behind. Far more uplifting and effective is Dante's vision, when the Beatrice whom he had loved and revered on earth had been made immortal by the touch of death! As the impersonation to him of divine truth and beauty,

she still cares for him, saves him from the deadly snares of sin, and leads him upward through the opening heavens, unfolding to him more and more of her divine radiance and beauty as he rises with her, through deeper experiences, with powers of vision constantly refined and enlarged.

Faust indeed is enlightened and raised above his former self, but not satisfied. His next step is to control nature and bend it to the service of man. He obliges Mephistopheles sorely against his will to reclaim a great amount of fertile land from the ocean. This land is assigned to Faust. He devises methods by which he shall make it the abode of thousands of happy families. Just at this time he sees that an elevated spot near him, which has long been occupied by a family of poor people, impairs his prospect. He endeavors to purchase it. But the old proprietor would think it sacrilege to sell the land which has come down to him from his fathers through many generations. In a moment

of vexation, Faust expresses his wish that the place might be destroyed. Mephistopheles immediately, without the knowledge of Faust, sets fire to the cottage, which with its inmates is at once destroyed. "One funeral pile consumes" them all. Faust curses "the inconsiderate, savage blow," and refuses to take advantage of it. Because of the covetous and impatient wish, however, to which he had given expression, he is struck blind; but because he immediately regretted what he had said and refused to profit by it, he has at the same time a clearer spiritual vision than before.

"The Night seems deeper now to press around me,  
But in my inmost spirit all is light;  
I rest not till the finished work hath crowned me:  
God's Word alone confers on me the might."

He urges on the work, and seeing already in his mind's eye its fulfilment, he exclaims:—

"A land like Paradise here, round about.  
Thus here, by dangers girt, shall glide away  
Of childhood, manhood, age, the vigorous day:  
And such a throng I fain would see,—  
Stand on free soil among a people free!"

While thus absorbed, and glowing with ecstacy at the thought of the happiness which he is to impart to generations yet unborn, he hails the fleeting moment with the fatal words :—

“ Ah, still delay — thou art so fair !  
The traces cannot, of my earthly being,  
In æons perish, — they are there ! —  
In proud fore-feeling of such lofty bliss,  
I now enjoy the highest Moment, — this ! ”

In that first happy moment of his whole life, being now a hundred years old, Faust sinks back, and dies.

Mephistopheles, moralizing over his dead body, says, in chilling irony, —

“ No joy could sate him, and suffice no bliss !  
To catch but shifting shapes was his endeavor :  
The latest, poorest, emptiest Moment — this, —  
He wished to hold it fast forever.  
Me he resisted in such vigorous wise,  
But Time is lord, on earth the old man lies.  
The clock stands still —

*Chorus.*      Stands still ! silent as midnight, now :  
The index falls.

*Meph.*            It falls, and it is finished, here ! ”

“ The Body lies, and if the Spirit flee,  
I'll show it speedily my blood-signed title.”

A sharp contest for the possession of Faust's soul arises between Mephistopheles and the angels. He is overawed by them. In spite of his mockery, as one baffled and powerless, he asks:—

“What now restrains me, that I dare not curse?”

The angels prevail, “bearing away the immortal part of Faust,” and singing:—

“Hallowed glories!  
Round whom they brood,  
Wakes unto being  
Of bliss, with the Good.  
Join ye, the Glorified,  
Rise to your goal!  
Airs are all purified,—  
Breathe now the Soul!”

The closing scene both by resemblance and contrast reminds us of Dante's *Paradiso*. The holy fathers, one after another, break out in songs of heavenly rapture or in prayer:—

“That all of mortality's  
Vain unrealities  
Die, and the Star above  
Beam but Eternal Love!”

“O God, soothe thou my thoughts bewildered,  
Enlighten Thou my needy heart!”

Then the angels again appear, soaring now in the higher atmosphere, bearing still the immortal part of Faust, and singing :—

“The noble Spirit now is free,  
And saved from all scheming :  
Whoe'er aspires unweariedly  
Is not beyond redeeming.  
And if he feels the grace of Love  
That from On High is given,  
The Blessed Hosts, that wait above,  
Shall welcome him to Heaven.”

But to whose hands shall he be committed, that he may be prepared to enter that higher realm, and hold communion with those who dwell there? This old man, who has spent a hundred years in gaining whatever knowledge the world in all its varying pursuits can give, is placed under the charge of the “Blessed Boys,” who had been taken from the earth in their earliest infancy,—placed with them that they might “inaugurate him to the perfect state,” even as Jesus, we read, “took a little child and placed him in the midst” of his ambitious disciples to be a teacher and

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example to them. So, the Blessed Boys  
receive Faust, singing:—

“ Gladly receive we now  
Him, as a chrysalis:  
Therefore achieve we now  
Pledge of our bliss.  
The earth-flakes dissipate  
That cling around him!  
See, he is fair and great!  
Divine Life hath crowned him.”

A chorus of penitent women intercede  
in his behalf with the Mater Gloriosa who  
represents the Divine Love. One of the  
Penitents, “formerly named Margaret,  
stealing closer,” prays:—

“ Incline, O Maiden,  
With Mercy laden,  
In light unfading,  
Thy gracious countenance upon my bliss!  
My loved, my lover,  
His trials over  
In yonder world, returns to me in this.”

“ Behold how he each band hath cloven,  
The earthly life had round him thrown,  
And through his garb of ether woven,  
The early force of youth is shown!  
Vouchsafe to me that I instruct him!  
Still dazzles him the day’s new glare.”

And to her, the Glorious Mother replies:

“ Come, lift thyself to higher spheres!  
When he has a spiritual sense of thy presence, he will follow.”

One of the great Doctors says:—

“ Penitents, look up, elate,  
Where she beams salvation;  
Gratefully to blessed fate  
Grow, in re-creation!  
Be our souls, as they have been,  
Dedicate to Thee!  
Virgin Holy, Mother, Queen,  
Goddess, gracious be ! ”

The Chorus Mysticus follows with the words:—

“ All things transitory  
But as symbols are sent;  
Earth’s insufficiency  
Here grows to Event:  
The Indescribable,  
Here it is done:  
The Woman-Soul leadeth  
Us upward and on.”

“ In these lines,” says Goethe, referring to the angels’ song beginning with, “ The noble Spirit now is free,” “ the key to Faust’s rescue may be found. In Faust himself, an ever higher and purer form of

activity to the end, and the eternal Love coming down to his aid from above. This is entirely in harmony with our religious ideas, according to which we are not alone saved by our own strength, but through the freely-bestowed Grace of God."

No two men could be more unlike in character and personal habits than Dante and Goethe. And no two poems, involving substantially the same problem, could well stand more widely apart than the tragedy of "Faust" and the "Divina Commedia." Yet no one, I think, who is familiar with the *Paradiso* can read the last scene in "Faust" without being strongly reminded of some of the most impressive and magnificent passages in the closing cantos of the great Italian poet. As in Dante the ancient schoolmen and fathers of the Church, so in Goethe the holy fathers turn our thoughts upward into the heavenly regions. As Dante shrinks from the attempt to introduce God visibly, even in the person of his Son, but employs Beatrice, the

impersonation of Divine Wisdom, to lead him upward to the eternal light, so Goethe employs intermediate agents, Mary Magdalén, the woman of Samaria, Mary of Egypt, and yet another of the penitents, "formerly named Margaret," to intercede for Faust, not directly with God, but with the Mater Gloriosa, "the Eternal Womanly," who, as the impersonation of the divine Love, comes "down to aid him from above," and to "draw him ever upward and on." We do not find in Goethe the terrible sense of personal reality which belongs to the older poet. In grandeur of conception, in elevation and spirituality of thought, in vividness of coloring, in tenderness and intensity of feeling, in steadfast and all-pervading emotions of reverence and adoration, the most sanguine admirers of Goethe can hardly find in the "Faust" any approach to what meets them in corresponding passages in the *Paradiso*.

There are many things in "Faust" which grate harshly on the sensitive nature of

persons delicately trained in Christian churches; many things which may shock us by their levity, their whimsical suggestions amid sacred associations, and an apparent irreverence in dealing with what is highest in morals as well as religion. But just here, in this trifling, scoffing habit, is the sphere in which the Devil of the nineteenth century presents his most attractive and dangerous allurements. It was well that Faust, the representative man of the age, should enter into it, and go through with the experience of its fascination, that so in his own person he might find out its shallowness. Thus only could he be enabled to go on questioning one thing after another, till all the resources of this earthly life were exhausted, and it only remained for him to seek in a higher realm that which alone could satisfy him. The apparent levity, which prevails only too much throughout the poem, must not shut our eyes to the profound seriousness which underlies the whole fabric, thus showing

the sincerity of Goethe's words as illustrated by this the greatest of his works:—

“Who ne'er his bread with tear-drops ate,  
And weeping on his bedside sate  
Through the long night's grief-laden hours,  
He knows you not, ye heavenly powers.”

The Second Part of Faust is not an easy poem to read. It is overloaded with a mass of materials too vast and various to be moulded into one organic whole. It would have been more attractive if it could have been completed by the spontaneous action of the poet's mind while the ideas were fresh, and the materials, less copious, were yielding themselves more pliantly to his touch. But as it is, involving in itself the carefully matured results of a lifelong experience, with an imagination absolutely free from all religious prepossessions, ransacking the universe of matter and spirit, to find something that might satisfy the desires of a human soul, it speaks with an authority which no youthful production could have had.

We think of Goethe as a worldly-minded man, who made light of many things which Christian men hold in reverence. But as a poet, he went down as few have done into the depths of our nature, filling out in his conceptions of man *as man* what will always be wanting in individual examples. And with the freest exercise of his inventive faculties from youth to age, the result of his life's work was the conviction that if we press on towards "an ever higher and purer form of activity," the Eternal Love will come down to aid us ; and so we may find our satisfaction here and our salvation hereafter. He had endeavored to place himself outside of all accepted religions and to reach something better than had yet been known, but in his ideal conceptions, following the leadings of an unfettered imagination, he rested at last in the elementary Christian truths which he might have learned as a child from his mother's lips.

## VI.

### *Old Testament Writers.*



“ I have also spoken by the prophets,  
And I have multiplied visions,  
And used similitudes,  
By the ministry of the prophets.”

HOSEA xii. 10.





## *Old Testament Writers.*

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T is the office of the poet to catch the deeper meaning suggested by transient objects or events, and so to set it forth, and infuse his spirit into his words, that he may cause us to see and feel as he does. Amid scenes of grandeur and beauty, his higher susceptibilities are touched; emotions, affections, aspirations, and longings are awakened, which find no appropriate satisfaction or home in this outward world, and, to meet their demands, his imagination transforms the purest and finest objects of sense into symbols of something finer and higher still. Thus Wordsworth describes his experiences at a time of impassioned spiritual exaltation:—

“And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy

Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all.”

By images like these, he takes us up with him into his mount of vision, and enables us with him to see

“A light that never was on sea or land,  
The consecration, and the poet’s dream.”

Here is the inspiration of a great poet.

We now pass to a very different example. Moses has been obliged to flee from Egypt in consequence of his intense sympathy with his enslaved and afflicted brethren. Born to be, under God, the founder of a nation, and the author of a religion which in its further development was to redeem and enlighten the world, he was at this time engaged in the humble occupation of keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro. His great soul was

brooding over the sorrows of his people, and seeing no possibility of liberating them from their cruel bondage, as he moved with his flock from place to place amid the mountain fastnesses, and in the solitudes of the desert.

“And he led the flock to the back side of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. . . . And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.”

Thus Moses, bearing upon his heart the sufferings and sorrows of his people, with his senses divinely quickened, at a moment of impassioned elevation, sees in the flaming bush before him, —

“A light that never was on sea or land.”

He hears a voice which others might not hear. In the consciousness of that higher presence, he is made to feel that the place whereon he stands is holy ground, and hides his face, fearing to look upon Him whom no man shall see and live. Here is the inspiration of a great prophet. Does it come from the same source as that by which the devout poet feels his inmost nature quickened and illuminated? Or was Milton wholly mistaken in his invocation at the beginning of “Paradise Lost,” —

“Sing, Heavenly Muse, that on the secret top  
Of Oreb or of Sinai, didst inspire  
That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,  
In the beginning how the heavens and earth  
Rose out of chaos.”

The word inspiration has always been associated with the poet in his grandest

achievements. And it has been used especially to suggest that quickening of the imagination by which he may see in man and his surroundings what the outward eye cannot see, and be able to set forth by appropriate images man's deeper nature, and the unseen conditions and agencies which are required for its growth and exercise.

Now if by this same faculty, "the vision and the faculty divine," he should be so inspired as to recognize and set forth distinctly the unseen laws or forces which belong to the moral and spiritual universe, we have the conditions needed to produce a divine revelation. Its value must depend on the character of the revelation itself, that is, on the clearness and extent of the vision, and the power with which it unfolds to us the higher laws and conditions of our being, in connection with the unseen moral and spiritual agencies which may act with us or upon us.

The form in which the inspired teacher presents his revelation to us must be that

which is suggested to him as best adapted to his purpose. There is hardly any form of historical, biographical, or poetical composition which is not thus employed in the Bible. The main object of the writers is to bring home to the minds and hearts of men the great truths in which their highest interests are involved. The literal fact, even in what bears the form of a historical statement, is often the least important element in the narrative; inasmuch as the question whether it actually occurred does not at all affect the deeper truth which it is intended to express. The lesson taught by the parable of the Pharisee and Publican, or by the book of Jonah, is wholly independent of the consideration whether such events ever actually took place.

In the historical and biographical parts of the Old Testament, traditions handed down, sometimes through many generations, are employed as vehicles of divine instruction. The literal truth of these traditions is usually of small importance, com-

pared with the higher truths which they are intended to express. The writer, therefore, would naturally be less anxious to arrange the outside details as they actually occurred, than to present them in such a way as most powerfully and truthfully to set forth the higher moral and spiritual lessons which they are employed to convey. For this reason, and in accordance with the habits of the East, the main facts, whether true or not, are often supplemented by details evidently interpolated by the writer, in order more effectively to illustrate and enforce the principal thought. An eminently good man dies suddenly. How is the event described? "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." Here the inspired writer, looking beyond what the eye can see, breaks through the limitations of our earthly knowledge, and opens to his readers deeper experiences and wider realms of being. Beyond the outward and visible, he sees the spiritual environment in which the faithful

servant of God had lived while on earth, and in which he still continues to live. This vital truth, as here taught, is entirely independent of the question whether the man Enoch ever actually existed. There is no word here to indicate a translation bodily from earth to heaven.

The story of Abraham, founded evidently on old traditions, when viewed in any light, is a most interesting and inspiring one. It loses nothing, but on the other hand gains greatly, in moral and religious impressiveness, if we regard it as filled out, in many of its details, by the divinely inspired imagination of the writer, so as to bring more fully into view great lessons which might not otherwise have been learned. Take, for example, the proposed sacrifice of Isaac. Circumstances may have arisen to convince Abraham, as was the case with thousands of parents in our civil war, that God required of him the sacrifice of his son. The one thing to be impressed forever on men's hearts by the

narrative was the readiness of the father to give up his son in obedience to the will of God. In accordance, therefore, with this ruling object and with the habits of the East, the actual facts may have been abbreviated, or they may have been enlarged by additional details, so as to exhibit with the greatest vividness and truth the one lesson which they were intended to illustrate and enforce. In a similar manner, we may interpret the long and earnest colloquy between Abraham and God, where the heart-felt intercessions of a devout soul for a doomed and wicked city are supplemented by the imagination of the writer, so as to fill out for us, in the words assigned to the Almighty, the part taken by God, which is usually hidden from us in our devotions. In like manner, the story of Jacob's wrestling with God, in a time of great personal anxiety, and refusing to let him go till he had secured his blessing, may be explained. By too severe a regard to the letter that killeth, we are

in danger of losing the spirit that giveth life.

That which is deepest and most life-giving in the Old Testament is what we should cherish as alone vitally essential. Goethe, who had read the Bible through several times in his boyhood and early youth, says, in regard to the superficial objections brought against it, and which he could not answer, they "did not affect my belief in the fundamental conceptions which lay at the root of them all; the significance of each, if not the harmony of the whole, I could fruitfully realize, and, altogether, I had put too much of my best soul into this book to be able ever afterwards to dispense with it as part of my spiritual nourishment. This enlistment of my best feelings on the side of the book made me proof through life against whatever sneers or railly I might find directed against it; for the spiritual good of which I had been partaker from the book had convinced me experimentally of the dishonesty of all such

irreverent assaults. On the other hand, any kind of thorough critical research honestly meant was grateful to me; all extension of our knowledge with regard to Oriental localities and costumes I appropriated eagerly, and I employed them without fear in the large and liberal interpretation of the traditions which my spiritual experience had made so dear to me."

It is thus that the writings of the Old Testament may always fill an important part in the spiritual education of the young. Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, and the rest, in the acts and words attributed to them, stand before us to-day as examples or teachers of an ideal thought and worship, and may help to quicken our devotions, and lift us up through higher or more vivid conceptions into holier and better lives. They were not perfect. Their vision was not unobstructed. They "were men of like passions with ourselves." And therefore all the more are they able to awaken our sympathies and help us in the

doubts, perplexities, misgivings, and shortcomings which we share with them.

The book of Job, with its solemn questionings, its tender pathos, its hallowed moments of assurance, its strugglings against doubt, its painful attempts to explain the mysteries of evil amidst the heaviest trials that can befall a good man, may not wholly satisfy our reason ; but as a divine tragedy it may come to us in our sicknesses and sorrows with a strange power of healing, and point out to us the direction in which we must go if we would pass from darkness to light, setting before us the experiences of one who has tried all the expedients of earthly success and failure and found them wanting.

The book of Ecclesiastes deals with the problem which Goethe used a lifetime in the attempt to solve, and ends in the only satisfactory “conclusion of the whole matter” then possible. “Fear God ; and keep his commandments : for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work

into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."

"By the inspiration of the Almighty," these writers were lifted above themselves, and from that elevation, in flashings from the great central light, they saw more clearly and farther than others could see. Where their reasonings failed, their spiritual intuitions or powers of vision left no room for doubt. From the depths of humiliation and penitence, after the commission of a most heinous crime, came the *Miserere*, in which the burdened heart of our sinful humanity still finds comfort and relief. The words, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," wrenched from a trusting soul by the sharpest anguish, in the light of the New Testament have taken on a meaning which the writer could not have foreseen, and, associated as they are with heavenly strains of music, come as a voice from heaven with their blessed assurance to millions of weary and sorrowing mortals.

Of this same goodly fellowship were the

extraordinary men who had such an influence with the Jewish people in the later days of the monarchy, and whose writings, through all succeeding ages, have been marked by their prophetic character. The highest reaches of the imagination in the moral world are always prophecies. He who most vividly sees what is in man sees also how indissolubly his fortunes, in the long run, are bound up with his obedience or disobedience to the laws of his moral and spiritual being. In following those laws on as ruling forces in the conduct of men or nations, he is able to foresee and predict future events. And what is true in the particular case before him is true for all time. That which was a prophecy for the Jews is a prophecy for us to-day, revealing to us as it does the working of those laws by which alone we can live. Because the Jewish prophets looked through the fleeting phenomena around them into the eternal laws by which human actions are to be governed and the destiny of men

and nations determined, the predictions they uttered for their own people still retain their prophetic character, and stand as solemn lessons for us and for all coming ages.

This power of associating future events with moral conditions so as to read the fortunes of the future in the character of the present, and in a corrupt age to divine the qualities which alone can redeem a sinful people, and give them a universal influence among the nations, was possessed by no one of the Jewish prophets in so remarkable a degree as by the writer of the closing chapters of Isaiah. It was a time of national humiliation and disaster. "Zion is a wilderness ; Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and beautiful house where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire, and all our pleasant things are laid waste." But through and beyond it all, with prophetic vision, he sees, for his regenerated people, "a new heaven and a new earth." But who is to be this great deliverer ?

No conquering hero. No mighty ruler. “When we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men: a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him.” “Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

He who amid overwhelming national calamities and apparent ruin could see in such an one the Saviour, not of the nation alone, but of the world, must have gone down into the deepest wants and capabilities of our nature, and have had, as no one around him had, a prevision of the moral and spiritual qualities which can regenerate men’s souls, and establish an everlasting kingdom on the earth. He may, by the special “inspiration of the Almighty,”

have been enabled to foresee, as a distinct individual, "him who was to come." Or his conception of the servant of God, under the only type of manhood in which he could redeem the world, may have been filled out for him by an exercise of the imagination equally sublime and equally inspired. And in that conception, he may have combined unconsciously the leading features of him who centuries later came to fill out, in his own thought and person, all that was wanting in those who had gone before. In either case, the writer's language was then, as it is now, a prophecy to the human soul of him, the ideal man, who alone, embosomed in the mind and heart of God, can meet its deepest and highest wants.

Towards this central figure in the history of our race, consciously or unconsciously, the yearnings of devout souls had been reaching forward. The greatest prophets in their moments of fullest inspiration and exaltation acknowledged their

own insufficiency. As Jesus said of them : "They did but prophesy." All that went before, the grandest reach of the imagination on the part of the loftiest, purest, and most richly endowed among the sons of men, even in their most inspired utterances, gave only foreshadowings, intimations, darkly or dimly awakening expectations, of some one greater still, in whom, not broken fragments of a disordered humanity, but all the fulness of man united in perfect harmony with God, and so all the fulness of God, should dwell. As pointing to this diviner light, and unfolding tenderly and powerfully to us a want which all may feel, these ancient prophetic writings are of unspeakable value still. Their longings for something better, their incomplete but still advancing ideas, their revelations, imperfect indeed, but conscious of imperfection, and looking forward to one greater yet to fill out what was wanting in them, may do much to help us in our approaches to that which is the fulfilment alike of law and prophecy.

## VII.

### *The Ideal Teachings of Jesus.*

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“The flesh profiteth nothing : the words that I speak unto you they are spirit, and they are life.” JOHN vi. 63.





## *The Ideal Teachings of Jesus.*

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**F**ROM the greatest of the prophets to him in whom their highest prophecies were more than fulfilled is a long step upwards, and we shrink from applying to him the sort of language we have used in speaking of them. It strikes us unpleasantly to hear him spoken of as the greatest of all the poets of humanity, and his teachings as embodying in form and substance the highest possible ideal conceptions of man, and the sphere of activities, human and divine, in which the full purposes of our being are to be accomplished. We think of him not only as supreme among the sons of men, but as standing apart by himself, above all principalities and powers. But in this we forget the pre-eminent characteristic of his greatness.

The greatness of earthly ambition separates a man from his race. It lifts him up into an icy isolation from which he looks down with pride and distrust on his fellow-men. But the greatness of Jesus only brings him into closer fellowship with man. If he was one with God, it was that he might draw us also into the same perfect sympathy and union, — “as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.” Our human nature is thus, as he would teach, enfolded in the divine. And in order to lift us up into this life-giving union, Jesus places himself on the plane of our common humanity. Whatever more he may have been, as man or God, he came here as the Son of man, subject to our human infirmities and trials, bearing our sicknesses that so he might be brought into closer relationship with us. The son of God in truth he was ; but it was as a man, with human faculties, human sympathies, human affections, human methods of action, and human forms of speech, that he

could bring down his divine thought and life to the heart of our humanity, and thus reach and regenerate the souls of men.

We cannot enter into the mind of Jesus as we enter into the mind of Dante or Milton, or of David and Isaiah, or even of St. Paul. We cannot understand how it was that the whole universe became to him a transparent medium, in which he saw and felt the workings of the Supreme mind, through laws and agencies unseen by those around him. And to apply to his words the terms which we apply to other writings, or to subject them to the same methods of examination, seems like an act of profanation. We shrink from using in this connection the term *ideal* or *imaginative*, as if we were thus lowering the character of his instructions.

But it is only from a human standpoint that he can speak to us so as to be understood. However clear the "vision" with which he looked into things human and divine, and however beyond appeal the

authority with which he speaks, it is only by using the forms of speech most expressive to us that he can make us partakers of his thought. And it is only by the exercise of our limited human faculties, and by employing the ordinary rules of investigation, that we can interpret his teachings.

As in all other cases, therefore, before and since his time, so also with him, the loftiest and most effective utterances of moral and spiritual truth must come as they do come to us, through the imagination,—the divining and creative faculty. He saw in the humble flower before him, as the source of its life, a creative act of God, and in each fragment of a human life he saw the law that pervades and governs the whole of our moral being. Each visible fact is filled out, to his mind, by the unseen law, and by the influences and the yet undeveloped results which are indissolubly bound up with it. With powers of vision more penetrating and comprehensive than have ever been known among

men, he saw, as no one else ever did, the unseen but ever present elements of power, justice, love, which are involved in apparently insignificant objects and events, and which are the fundamental laws of life and of human society. And what he thus saw he set forth by images which appeal through the imagination to the minds of those whom he would address.

Living, as he did, in what is to us an ideal world, in the bosom of God, at the centre of all moral and spiritual influences, the words he uses are saturated with its spirit, and filled out, through his deeper insight and by his creative imagination, with a meaning which it is often very difficult for us to appreciate. As one who visits the home of his childhood sees around him dear forms, which others cannot see, and every silent stone or tree awakens affecting memories, and touches chords of emotion which others may not understand, so Jesus sees everywhere tokens of a diviner presence, a deeper life, holier and more

beneficent purposes and influences, than those who live on a lower plane can fully comprehend. His simplest expressions, therefore, often come to us charged with a richer and deeper meaning than we are prepared at once to recognize.

One of the truest tests of imaginative genius shows itself in the power of endowing common words with a significance beyond what originally belonged to them. Dante speaks of being obliged to give to the language employed by him a meaning which it never had before, and the skill with which he causes material images to suggest facts belonging to a higher range of experience strikes us as one of the most marvellous features of his great work. The same faculty shows itself in Shakspere, running through his writings as lightning through the telegraph wires, making them mediums of a higher intelligence than is patent on the surface.

Far above all other writings, in this respect, are the Gospels. They who receive

them only in a literal sense know not what they are. Most of us, however, are so accustomed to take them in a higher sense, that we lose sight of their literal meaning, and forget the power by which those simple words have been made effective in creating a new heaven and a new earth for those who receive them into their hearts. We have only to repeat the most familiar passages, to see how easily and naturally Jesus has taken words up from their humble or homely belongings, and made them harbingers of a divine message. "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." "Pray ye the lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers into his harvest." "The marriage feast." "The pearl of great price." Perhaps no word has been more entirely transfigured, enlarged, changed from the transient to the eternal, than the word "life," as it enters into our Christian consciousness, bearing with it the deeper, broader, more vital ideas and associations which he has infused into it, and through

which the world itself has become regenerated.

Jesus sees in all outward objects the emblems of something higher than themselves. In nature he recognizes a divine presence, acting everywhere as a perpetually renewing and creative energy. When therefore he speaks of natural objects, he speaks as one who sees what no chemist or naturalist has ever seen. Thus he fills out the visible beauty of common flowers with the ever-present agency of Him who "so clothes the grass of the field" "that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." To his mind, the falling sparrow in its apparent isolation and helplessness is followed in its descent by the pitying eye of God.

Not in the material world, however, but in man does he find the highest expression, and the truest image that is given in nature, of the creative mind. He does not speak of God as a law, an all-pervading, impersonal presence or influence, though

he recognizes Him in that capacity. From man, the highest type of existence visible to us, — higher than the sun or stars, and governed by higher laws, — he has borrowed the words, “Our Father who art in heaven,” by which he would bring home to our hearts the truest and most affecting thought of God. As with the greatest poets, so with Jesus also, man is the object of paramount interest. “He knew what was in man;” and no one else has filled out the sphere of man’s capabilities, the supreme laws of his being, or the sphere of influences acting upon him, on so complete and so vast a scale. To his mind, the human soul, so divinely endowed, is greater and of more value than the material universe. “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” This conception of the unspeakable value of the soul and the closeness of its relationship to God runs through all his teachings, and lends an ideal charm and dignity to our common duties and rela-

tions. Into our homes, permeated and presided over by the divine love, he would bring a source of perennial joy and beauty by greater purity of heart and a more devoted union of husband and wife. And while thus securing by indissoluble ties the closest of earthly relations, he fills out the thought of these family endearments, and gives them a healthful enlargement, by throwing around our homes, and bringing into them as a vital force, a more comprehensive ideal of brotherhood. "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it." "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me." A Christian home is thus the ideal centre of affections which reach up to the fountain of all love and blessedness, while they also reach out to all around in silent benedictions, in kindly words, and tender benefactions, uniting entire neighborhoods, and indeed the whole human family, within the same ideal brotherhood. To

his enlarged conception, they who should come in from the north and the south, from the east and the west, the living and the dead, were to be, as Paul has said, one family "on earth and in heaven." What an expansive stretch of the imagination does it require to take in this conception in all its sweetness and extent!

I know of no imaginative writings among the poets which take us into such a realm of ideal life and beauty as the Beatitudes, revealing to us mental and moral conditions, and ever-present influences and satisfactions, which exceed in value all outward possessions, and transform disappointments, privations, and sorrows into instruments of love and of a transcendent blessedness. Here he brings home to the poor in spirit the kingdom of heaven as already theirs, and bears witness to an atmosphere so clear that they who live in it — the pure in heart — shall see God.

Everywhere in the Gospels, by what in any other teacher we should call the trans-

figuring power of the imagination, images drawn from things material, and apparently commonplace and evanescent, are filled out by suggestions which take us up into what is eternal and divine. At the temple in Jerusalem, amid the profuse and ostentatious offerings of the rich, a certain poor widow came and threw in two mites equal to a farthing, — a very ordinary act, a very mean sort of a person, it must have appeared to those who were looking on. But there was one present who was able to put himself in her place, to divine her thought, and, beyond what others saw, to appreciate her secret motives in the great sacrifice she was making. And in the light thus thrown around it, that apparently insignificant act was taken out of the sphere of perishing things, and has been through all the ages an encouragement and help to those — the poor and the friendless — who have needed it most. The box of precious ointment poured upon the feet of Jesus awakened in Judas only feelings

of indignation, and even to others of the disciples seemed a needless waste. But in the spirit which prompted it, Jesus saw the unselfish, reverential love which delighted so to express itself ; and through his words, that act, filling then the house with its fragrance, has gone with a still more grateful perfume wherever his gospel has been preached throughout the whole world, "a memorial of her," and a symbol of what is most beautiful in the holiest affections, touched and uplifted by a thankful reverence. Where among all the great works of genius do we find a simple act like this so taken out of the sphere of transient events by the creative imagination of the poet, and so embalmed and glorified as to create a new world of beauty, and throw its light and charm around every similar act ? For here, by canonizing this lowly act, Jesus has created for us also an ideal world of refined tastes and sentiments, in which our most delicate instincts, our holiest and most self-forgetting affections, may delight to dwell.

Once, as Jesus stood by the lakeside, behold, “A sower went forth to sow,” and straightway, through his creative words and presence, the whole outward scene is transformed into a sphere of invisible agencies, in whose workings man’s eternal interests are involved. “The field is the world, the good seed are the children of the kingdom.” “The harvest is the consummation of the age, and the reapers are the angels.”

In the greatest poems, there are little secluded nooks, secret confessionals, or domestic scenes, and private conversations, which are very dear to us, as they go always with us, and, more than any private cabinet of jewels, help to enrich and beautify our chambers of imagery. The parting of Hector and Andromache in Homer’s Iliad, the story which Dante tells of Francesca da Rimini, and of his first meeting with Beatrice after she had “risen from body to spirit,” the few loving words of Cordelia to her father when he had been

left in utter wretchedness and desolation, are passages of this sort, and show in each poet the highest point that he ever attained. The atmosphere which scenes like these have once created around us has so associated itself with our dearest thoughts that it abides with us always.

Such passages abound in the Gospels far more than in all the great poets. Almost every word of Jesus comes to us with its far-reaching suggestions, and its refining, uplifting influences. Common incidents or familiar objects are filled out with ideas which take us into sweeter and higher realms. The heaven in which he lived infuses itself into all his thoughts, gives its ideal coloring to his language, and so folds itself around us as a living atmosphere. Compared with the world in which he lived and moved as in his native element, and whose spirit is breathed around us now by his words, the grandest creations of other poets, except in what they borrow from him, seem poverty-stricken. Even

“Isaiah’s hallowed strains” seem hardly more than the earnest gropings and strugglings of a half-illuminated mind, moved by a divine impulse, and feeling its way upward towards the light.

From our easy familiarity with the Gospels, and the mechanical manner in which we have come to think and speak of them, we fail to see them as they are, and to recognize in them the creative power that should act on us and open our eyes to new worlds of thought, affection, and emotion. And what is it but the ideal element inter-fused through them that gives such a power to what would otherwise seem like very simple expressions? “The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” Yet homeless and shelterless as he was, at that very moment he was asking men to follow him as their highest privilege and joy.

What but the ideal thought in which he lived and with which his whole being

was saturated has thrown such a world of pathos and such a divine fascination and power into the words, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killst the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Or where else shall we find words which have such a divine sweetness, and such a world of tender healing and comfort, as in his gracious invitation: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Where among the poets do we find single expressions which come to us with such power to take us beyond their literal meaning into unseen soul-satisfying realities? Or what single picture or episode in any of the great Epics or Tragedies appeals so powerfully to the imagination as the story of The Pharisee

and Publican, The Prodigal Son, or The Rich Man and Lazarus? The more critically we examine them as works of the imagination, the more perfect we shall find them both in form and substance ; and the more entirely we give ourselves up to them, the more shall we be impressed by a sense of “the virtue” which may come out from them, to touch our moral and spiritual sensibilities, to heal our diseases, and to quicken our holiest affections.

Or, if we seek for creations on a grander scale, I know of no place in all the realm of poetic creations, where we may find anything to compare with the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of Matthew in sublimity and pathos, in breadth and loftiness of conception, in elevation of sentiment or in depth of spiritual insight. In the progress of the narrative we feel that a deepening solemnity has been gathering round us. At last, with one majestic sweep of the imagination, Jesus, looking through the ages, brings into one vast perspective

all the generations of men, to undergo the great ordeal through which each individual soul must pass,—men's actions here in their separate and solemn distinctions following them on from time to eternity. Yet so wonderfully drawn is the picture, that in all this application of inexorable law, room is left for the manifestation of personal feeling, and in this countless throng and multitude, each individual soul stands before us with its own separate record, and its undertone of surprised joy or grief. As a powerful presentation of the most majestic, the most affecting and awful images that can ever be suggested to the mind of man, the poetry of the world furnishes no parallel to the passage beginning with the words, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations."

Outward, visible, material images are employed to set forth facts of the profoundest

spiritual significance. No literal interpretation meets the conditions of the case. Dante, as we have seen, speaking of a nobleman who, having invited friends to a feast at his house, caused them to be murdered there, tells us that when that act of treachery and murder was done, the soul of the murderer was immediately hurried down into one of the lowest depths of hell, and that his body, which remained alive in Genoa, was thenceforth possessed and animated by a devil. More impressive language could not be used to express a great and terrible fact. But no one now would take it, as some of his contemporaries did, to be interpreted literally in all its details. In the parables of Jesus, in accordance with the laws of human thought and the necessities of language, images the most touching, majestic, and awful ever presented to the mind of man are brought forward, to give an added vividness to the scene, and to awaken in us some sense of the momentous issues for weal or woe in-

volved in our conduct here. But the imagery in its separate parts is to be regarded only as the superficial vehicle in which the more vital and substantial thought and impression are conveyed.

I have gone somewhat into detail in the treatment of my subject. Viewed simply in this light, as works of the imagination, the teachings of Jesus have a vitality, a suggestiveness, a tenderness, a majesty, a quickening power, a beauty, and a grandeur so surpassingly great and peculiar that in all these eighteen hundred years no man, however lofty his genius, no Dante or Shakspere or Milton or Goethe, has ever added to his words a single sentence which the best minds of the world would judge worthy of his utterance.

Let us for a few moments look at our subject in a more comprehensive light. Dante did much to deepen the moral convictions of men, to enlarge, to deepen and intensify their spiritual conceptions, and to give them a new sense of reality in regard

to the deepest interests of life and the unseen agencies around them. Shakspere invented new forms of intelligence and beauty, love and devotion, new examples of thought and life, which have revealed in man new capabilities, wants, and affections. He has thus enlarged the sphere of human interests and activities. As to what is highest in both these mighty geniuses, — they drew their inspiration and their ideas from one in whose footsteps they reverently counted it a privilege and an honor to be permitted to walk.

It is difficult to look in this larger way at what Jesus has done to fill out our conceptions of what is holiest and best in our human life and conduct, in our relations to one another, and in the intimate and vital union which may exist between man and God, or our connection with his unseen presence and kingdom. From the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount to his last affecting words upon the cross, “Father, into thy hands I commit my

spirit," he takes us through what is to us an ideal realm. He fills it out with images of fidelity, justice, love, and mercy, human and divine, which reach down into the inmost depths of our being, and, with our advancing powers of thought and our perpetually renewed spiritual perceptions, create around us an ever enlarging sphere, in which all our best faculties may find their fitting exercise and enjoyment. In that ideal realm he lived. Its reality was the one all-pervading and controlling fact. By word or deed, by miracle or parable, with the poor Syro-Phœnician woman or on the mountain of transfiguration, in private conference with his disciples or in the temple confronting the leading men of his nation with words of terrible significance,—from his baptism in the Jordan to his last visible appearance on the Mount of Olives, whatever he did or said or was comes to us filled out by the consciousness of that ideal realm. His lightest words, hardly less than his gravest instructions, suggest

it to us, as it always lay in his mind. The sight of the ravens or the lilies calls up the thought of him who feeds or clothes them. Or, to take one example more, as a fitting close to what I have to say, in this direction, of him who came to exalt the humble, and to save that which is lost: “Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth.” Where among the great poets do we find objects apparently so ordinary and commonplace endowed with the power of lifting us up to a thought so affecting and sublime? By these homely images, the shilling that was lost, the woman who sought diligently till she had found it, and the friends and

neighbors whom she called in to rejoice with her, Jesus sets before us the loving sympathy of the angels in heaven with every sinful one on earth who turns again to God. Everywhere he sees something that is to him most tender, majestic, and beautiful in the homeliest of human interests and relations, and lifts them up into a grander significance and beauty by associating them, in the closest possible union, with what is divine.

Very wonderful, as viewed in this light, are the teachings of Jesus. But still more wonderful is the manner in which, by the transforming power of the imagination, he identifies himself with his teachings. When the Jews, in perplexity and anger, scoffingly asked of him, "Who art thou?" he answered them in substance, "What I say to you that essentially (*Tὴν ἀρχὴν*) I am." (John viii. 25.) So perfectly was he, in his daily thoughts and acts, and in his entire being, bound up with what is highest in morals and religion, that he comes

to us as the illustration and embodiment of what he taught. Living, as he did, in perfect union with God, all the higher faculties of our nature were unfolded, and all the divine qualities and attributes which can exist in a human form were incarnated in him, so that we have in him an expression of the grandest possibilities of man, and of the fullest manifestation that can be given of the mind and character of God. In the consciousness of the indwelling presence of God, he identified his own thoughts with the suggestions of the divine mind, and thus identified himself with God. "I and my Father are one." The coming of the Son of Man was, in his thought, the same as the coming of the kingdom of God. And he regarded as his ministers or angels, all the divine agencies by which his work was to be carried out, and spoke of himself as directing them in the struggles and trials through which his religion should pass, as well as in its triumphant progress. Of

this fact we have remarkable examples in the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of Matthew, and in his last conversation with his disciples, as given to us in the Gospel of John.

Here, in the identification of himself with his teachings and his work, and, above all, with Him in whom he lived, is that which separates him from all other teachers, giving him "a name above every name," and exalting his ideal conceptions above every other "principality and power." His consciousness of his own human personality was often lost in the consciousness of God's indwelling presence, so entirely did he live in harmony, or rather in unison, with God. This oneness with his Father, which is most distinctly brought out and emphasized in the fourth Gospel, gives a transcendent grace and attractiveness to the loftiest expressions recorded by the other evangelists. Bearing in mind that his thoughts came to him, or rather unfolded themselves within him, as prompt-

ings from the mind and heart of God, we may appreciate his feeling, when he says, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."



## VIII.

*The End.*

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“And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.”—**1 CORINTHIANS xv. 28.**





## *The End.*

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**H**IIS little book, in its treatment of a great subject, lays no claim to completeness. It deals rather with hints and illustrations of facts which, when subjected to a thorough analysis and carried forward to their legitimate results, may, I think, be found to include the most affecting and effective truths of our religion. The one underlying thought, which gives a meaning to all the rest, is that of God everywhere, the central force, the quickening life, the guiding intelligence, by whom all created things are united in one harmonious system, each dependent on all, and all on each. Each therefore is united with all the rest, and with Him who “is over all, and in all, and through all.” If, then, any single object

could be fully known by us in all its relations, immediate and remote, it would reveal to us the whole order of the universe, and the mind of Him who sustains it in every part, and carries it onward by a perpetual and progressive act of creation. Man, as the highest type of creation personally known to us, may be regarded as being, in himself, the most advanced expression of the mind of God to be found among created things. And they who have the profoundest insight into his capabilities, active or dormant, must see most clearly the higher laws of his nature, and the facts connected with his moral and spiritual constitution. The great poets of humanity, therefore, may be summoned, as competent witnesses, to testify to the higher faculties of our nature, and to the beliefs and wants which are essential to their healthy and complete development. As we rise, by lines of gradation not always perceptible, through different degrees of "the inspiration of the Almighty, which

giveth understanding," we are introduced to the long line of poets, seers, and prophets, who, in the higher development and advancing intelligence of the race, have unfolded to us, more and more distinctly, the laws of our spiritual being, and the touching and sublime facts connected with them. At last, we come to one foreshadowed indeed by them, in whom their grandest ideas have something far more than their fulfilment.

And here, as we enter into his thought and life, we are vitally connected with influences which unite earth and heaven, and bring us everywhere into sympathy with what is divine. Our highest thoughts and our deepest experiences associate themselves with the eternal life, and make it ours. The desires of the ungodly shall perish. The love of the selfish and the sensuous shall die. But that which brings us into oneness with Christ brings us into oneness with God, and makes us and all that essentially belongs to us immortal.

The golden experiences of the past come transfigured before us, and lift our eyes upward to a holier companionship. Earthly desires are transmuted into heavenly affections. Whatever we have known and loved takes on a diviner meaning, as we live and believe in him who is the resurrection and the life.

For in him the Word was made flesh. All of the divine intelligence and attributes that can be incorporated in a human life were incarnated in him. Ideas suggested to poets and prophets in their moments of loftiest inspiration are filled out with a diviner meaning in the teachings of Jesus. And his teachings have their most living and life-giving exemplification and manifestation in the august and wonderful personality, human and divine, of the teacher. The Incarnation, "God in Christ reconciling the world to himself," and, therefore, God in humanity, a redeeming, sanctifying presence, is the great doctrine of the New Testament. But the world

has been slow to receive it. Through ages of darkness and sin it has been struggling to gain admittance to the souls of men. Even now the language of its great exemplar is, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." And few are ready to accept the conditions and make the sacrifices which he requires of them, that they may know the blessedness of giving themselves up entirely to him.

Nevertheless, the prophetic vision is no illusion. The sign of the Son of Man may not be recognized by us ; but he is coming in the heavens with power and great glory. The more deeply we enter into his spirit, and the more fully we partake of the life that was in him, the more shall we be sustained and gladdened by the divine assurance. Therefore it is that we look forward "in sure and certain hope" to the day when the beneficent purposes of his Advent shall be accomplished, when the whole family of man shall be included in his prayer, "that they all may be one, as

thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us," and when the prayer itself, in its largest and most catholic sense, shall be fulfilled by the perfect union of man with God.



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